

Scandal and scam in Nepal's 'orphanage industry'

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Saudi Arabia – making friends, making enemies



The Saudi regime won't like this magazine. Nor will the Western governments who kowtow to it while exploiting its wealth and paranoia – which have been on full show recently.

The Saudi justice ministry threatened to sue a Twitter user who compared the regime with ISIS after poet Ashraf Fayadh was sentenced to death 'for spreading atheism and disrespecting the prophet'. This was met with an international #SueMcSaudi campaign.

Humour is a good response to absurd displays of power. But in the kingdom itself, there is little place for it. There is no media independence; it is effectively controlled by the royal family. It's illegal to speak to foreign journalists without authorization and what you say could easily land you in jail.

Less easy to control is social media, which has a tremendous take-up in Saudi Arabia but is also not without risks. The regime has invested in systems to track users and in digital media itself. One Saudi prince has a five-per-cent – the second largest – share in Twitter, for example.

What is guaranteed to please neither the Saudi ruling elite nor Western governments is our interview with Julian Assange. He talks about the latest batch of SaudiLeaks, the dissemination of which is punishable by 20 years in a Saudi jail. So do spread the word.

Elsewhere, we uncover a Nepalese orphanage scam and our *Worldbeater* takes a pop at mild reformer turned pompous autocrat, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, president of Turkey. ■

Vanessa Baird

VANESSA BAIRD
for the New Internationalist Co-operative
newint.org

This month's contributors include:



Madawi Al-Rasheed is a Saudi-born professor of social anthropology. She has taught at King's College London and is currently visiting professor at the LSE. She has written many books focusing on religion, gender, migration and globalization.



Samuel Malik is a reporter with the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR) in Nigeria. He is passionate about investigating corruption and human rights abuses, especially by security agents.



Nafeez Ahmed is an investigative journalist and best-selling author who studies violent conflict in the context of global, ecological and economic crises. He is a winner of the Project Censored Award and his work contributed to the 9/11 and 7/7 inquiries.



Fiona Broom is a freelance journalist based in Kathmandu, Nepal, with intermittent trips to Lebanon to practise her rusty Levantine Arabic. Fiona focuses her work on human rights and environmental issues.

What if the rich didn't control our media?

It's not easy being an independent non-profit subscriber-funded magazine in this big capitalist world. Print media in particular is becoming more concentrated in fewer hands. With media budgets slashed and layoffs occurring weekly, journalists focus on an ever-narrowing agenda and Majority World voices are particularly sidestepped.

New Internationalist promotes and defends independent journalism. Yet

independent journalism is an endangered species. People are reading more of their news online and expecting it for free, without questioning if what they're reading is accurate or has an agenda. Quality independent journalism needs money, to research and investigate articles and present a balanced story.

That's why we are running our fundraising appeal. **We need to raise**

£30,000 (US \$43,000 / CAD \$60,000) by the end of April to fund our in-depth journalism. Can you help us?

Let's show that independent journalism is here to stay!
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Helen Wallis
For New Internationalist



A large, stylized pink piggy bank silhouette serves as the background for the main text. The piggy bank is facing right, with its head and ears clearly defined.

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Fayez Nuredine/Getty

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Coming soon: Forests

Praise, blame and all points in between? Give us your feedback.

The **New Internationalist** welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They might be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Letters should be sent to letters@newint.org or to your local **NI** office. Please remember to include a town and country for your address.

Refugees deserve better

My heartfelt feedback on *Humanity adrift* (NI 489):

I remember 1974. It was the year of my immigration from England to Australia. Sea sickness consumed me and all I could think of was getting to land, land that was still. It never crossed my mind that I would not make it. The ship was strong and if you did not feel sick it was a holiday on the ocean.

Today it is concerning. Refugees risk everything to get to land and deserve better. Many die at sea. My heart feels for humanity adrift on our planet's ocean, where the rights of human beings are being painfully denied.

Glenda Panikoula Perth, Australia

Symptoms and causes

Re: Mark Boyle's 'The violence of nonviolent protest', NI 489. Boyle does not quote one single instance to illustrate where violent action would have produced a better, more effective outcome. And I doubt that he can.

What kind of violent action does he have in mind? What is he going to do? Eat the heads of corporations? Or is he jealous of the apparent success ISIS are having at the moment? Does he imagine a campaign based on violent activism in today's world and focused on 'effective action' can look very different from that of ISIS?

He is surely not thinking of violent revolution? I would have thought that those of the past few centuries are ample proof that they are not effective: an Emperor Napoleon within a few years of the French Revolution, a Stalin within a few days of the Russian Revolution, a

Mao Need I go on?

The protest movements of the last half-century appear to be disparate and to have made little progress, not because they have not been sufficiently violent, but because we protest against symptoms, not causes. We are afraid to look for causes, because we fear that they are too difficult to shift and it would take too long. How would we substantially shift corporate business and politics away from greed, dishonesty and competition and towards co-operation, truthfulness and kindness?

Percy Mark Chair, Reverence for Life UK

Public vs private

I would like to disagree with Dinyar Godrej that the economy will recover better by the government

spending more money on jobs for the public sector (NI 488). Gordon Brown did this by giving 500,000 non-jobs to the public sector and we collapsed, leaving no money for the coalition. They removed these and created 500,000 useful private-sector jobs and made a good start into saving the economy, which the next government is continuing.

How can public-sector jobs help the economy when they pay no taxes? Private-sector jobs like my pension are the only ones that pay taxes to pay the public sector.

I do oppose globalization, because it helps the rich to pay no taxes and have tax havens.

Companies should all be based in the country and controlled by their

government and elected MPs, hopefully removable if corrupt.

TTIP proves how much excessive power companies already have.

Peter Foreman Chelmsford, England

[Public-sector workers pay taxes like anyone else. However, some argue that as they are paid by the government, these are not real taxes. – Ed]

Ahem...

In an otherwise impressive interview (*And finally*, NI 488), the director Ramin Bahrani asks – presumably rhetorically – 'Who else but Scorsese could have made *The Godfather*?'

Er, Francis Ford Coppola perhaps?

Mark Demetrius Sydney, Australia

The views expressed on the letters page are not necessarily those of the **New Internationalist**.

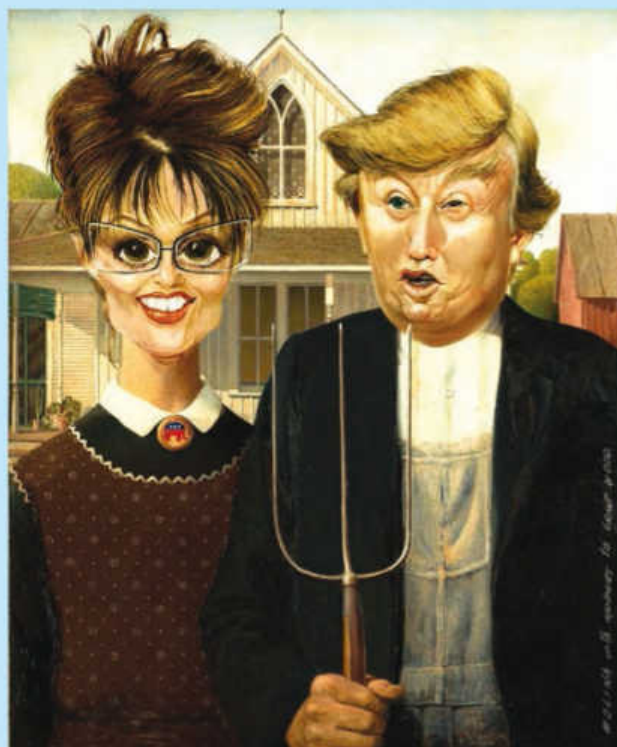
OPEN WINDOW

Each month we showcase the work of a different cartoonist – in collaboration with cartoonmovement.com

THIS MONTH

Pedro X Molina from Nicaragua with 'Republican Gothic'

A portrait of Sarah Palin and Donald Trump, based on 'American Gothic', a famous painting by Grant Wood from 1930. **Pedro X Molina** is a cartoonist and illustrator based in the Nicaraguan capital, Managua. His cartoons are published in the national daily *El Nuevo Diario* and he edits the newspaper's weekly humour supplement *El Alacran*.



Close your heart, open your heart

What repercussions does learning to ignore suffering have on a society?
wonders RUBY DIAMONDE.



It's a pitiful sight: a woman sitting on the ground, filthy dress ripped wide open exposing her chest, staring ahead with blank eyes. She looks like she's eating dirt. We are driving right past her in my car.

'Isn't there anything we can do?' I ask my friend Barbara. It's not the first time I've seen half-naked vagrant women on the streets, but she looks so very young, this road is isolated and she's horribly vulnerable.

'I've seen her before,' says Barbara. 'She's crazy in the head, she just tears off clothes she's been given. There's nothing you can do. *Kanga bé*, close your heart. Try to forget about her.'

Kanga bé. The sentiment behind these two words fascinates and disturbs me in equal measure. Central Africans often say they have to close their hearts to the suffering and wrongs in their country in order to keep going, in order not just to give up and wither under the stress of daily violence, barricades on the roads, living under curfew and the embedded distrust between communities that frequently erupts into bloodshed. *Kanga bé* is not just a mantra, it's a survival mechanism.

But is it? Closing your heart here in the Central African Republic also means suppressing your humanity and looking the other way when people literally can't look after themselves. It is not the poverty here that shocks me the most: there are poor people everywhere in the world – and I've

seen worse physical deprivation in India. But here the most vulnerable Central Africans, the elderly, disabled people, abandoned children and those who are mentally ill or clearly traumatized, or both, are left to fend for themselves in the streets. I have never heard of a trauma centre or mental-health facility to support them. People just get by from one day to the next, any way they can.

A price that Central Africans pay for this collective and selective culture of denial is a sub-culture of vengeance. Scores are settled with fists, machetes and guns, by burning down houses and raping women and girls, by communities separating along ethnic or religious lines and seeing the 'other' as the enemy, maintaining distance and spreading rumours. By closing their hearts.

But amongst these grim realities, I also see bright evidence of the contrary. For instance, in a horrible recent spate of violence that has yet to be fully explained, Bangui Muslim and Christian communities fled from each other: yet at the end of one bloody day 65 Christian families found themselves seeking refuge in the Central Mosque at the heart of Bangui's Muslim community. These Christian families had nothing – but their neighbours brought them food and water and blankets and looked after them and demanded nothing in return for weeks, until it was safe for the displaced to

return to their homes. This does not fit the *kanga bé* narrative at all. But this too is a reality, of open hearts.

It is always easier to write about the *exactions*, the terrible things that Central Africans do to each other, and to despair about the future here, in one of the poorest and most deprived countries on earth. As a writer I do want to ask hard-headed questions about the chronic nature of violence here – but I am not prepared to write this country off. After more than two and a half years in the Central African Republic I know many different Central Africans, including people who close their hearts and those who refuse to do so.

I know my friend Barbara can be tough: but I've seen her bite her lip so as not to cry when faced with a gaunt sick child, to whose family she donated a portion of her wages so they could pay for medical treatment. 'I was the only person they knew with money. They needed me,' she tells me afterwards. 'We have to stand together for our kids.' I remember her shy smile when she admitted this, and I said nothing, but then understood that kindness here is often hidden, while violence shouts out loud.

Or, as another friend of mine here puts it: 'We Central Africans are like onions; it takes time, and tears, to peel us apart and find what is really going on inside. So don't judge us yet.' ■

Ruby Diamonde is a pseudonym.

PERU

The merry-go-rounders

On 10 April, some 30 million Peruvians will head to polling stations across the Andean nation – where voting is obligatory – and cast their first-round ballots for president.

The current incumbent, Ollanta Humala, is barred from standing for re-election by a law designed to combat power consolidation. But this principle is endangered by former presidents' determination to pursue non-consecutive terms. This is the case for two of the race's front-runners: Keiko Fujimori and Alan García.

García, who was polling at near 10 per cent in pre-election surveys in January, has served as president twice before: from 1985-90 in the middle of a deep financial and social crisis, and then again from 2006-11, during a period of unprecedented growth and stability – though he left office under the cloud of corruption allegations.

Fujimori has not been president before, but her father Alberto has. He followed on from García in 1990 and led the country through a series of wrenching IMF-sponsored financial reforms as well as an all-out war in the country's interior against Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), a millenarian Communist guerrilla group.

Alberto Fujimori's regime was marked by a penchant for autocracy. He dissolved Congress in a 1992 'solo-coup', which ultimately led to a major mobilization against him and his top lieutenants in 2000. Alejandro Toledo, who served as president between Fujimori and García's second term, is also running.



Danielle Pereira under a CC Licence

Keiko, as Fujimori's daughter is known, is running a campaign that not only recalls her father's time in office, but is being explicitly managed by Alberto himself from the prison cell that he occupies following a conviction for human rights abuses.

Peruvian daily *El Comercio* reported that over the course of 90 days the ex-president received no fewer than 653 visitors, among them campaign managers, local party cadres and even foreign journalists. Keiko has repeatedly said that she would pardon her father upon taking on the presidential mantle – a move some 35 per cent of the electorate apparently supports.

Following Keiko in the polls are the technocratic octogenarian Pedro Pablo Kuczynski and Cesar Acuña, an entrepreneur and politician who has repeatedly been investigated for misallocated campaign funds.

If, as is most likely, no candidate gains a simple majority, voters will be back in the booths on 5 June. ■

Lucas Iberico Lozada

ANGOLA

Jailed for reading

It is not every day that people are accused of planning a coup simply for talking about democracy. Last June, this fate befell 15 political and human rights activists in Angola when they were arrested for organizing a discussion in a bookstore in the capital, Luanda.

The book reading of Gene Sharp's essay on nonviolent resistance *From Dictatorship to Democracy* earned the activists charges ranging from preparing a *coup d'état* to an assassination attempt on the president, José Eduardo dos Santos.

The show trial of a total of 17 activists, who campaign to hold Angola's ruling elites accountable for a range of social ills, began last November. Several of the accused went on hunger strike to protest against their treatment. Among them was

well-known rapper Luaty Beirão, who starved himself for 36 days. Beirão's case attracted protests from around the world, demanding '*Liberdade Já!*' (Freedom Now) – and may have prompted the government to move activists from prison to house arrest just before Christmas.

The regime of President dos Santos – in power for over 36 years – has long drawn criticism for its authoritarian misrule of Angola, where gross violations of human rights and civil liberties are routine.

After three decades of crippling civil war (1975-2002), Angola now has one of Africa's fastest-growing economies due to its plentiful natural resources, especially oil.

But dos Santos uses this new-found oil wealth to maintain his grip on power. Angola has the world's highest mortality rate for children under five, despite being classified as a 'middle-

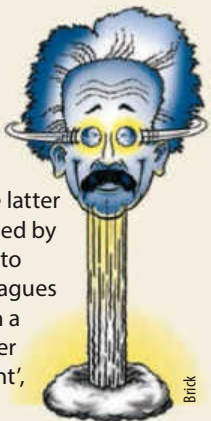
income country' based on its GDP.

The activists' case has helped expose this extreme inequality and Angola's brutal rule to a worldwide audience. They deserve our support. ■

**nin.tl/Angola15
Marc Herzog**

15 years ago...

...this month, one of the strangest regular features ever run by *New Internationalist* reached its penultimate episode. In the latter part of 1999, possibly infected by millennial fever, I managed to persuade my editorial colleagues to let me play in public with a piece of whimsy called 'Ether Street'. In this 'entertainment', three young *NI* readers in a



ON THE WEB
newint.org

**Moving from 'no borders' to
broaderland for the borderless**



**Facebook and India: introducing
a digital caste system**

IRAN A volley of protest

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has thrown its weight behind a challenge to Iran's ban on women watching volleyball matches.

Iranian women have been banned from attending live sporting events since the 1979 revolution, which declared it 'un-Islamic'. But in 2012, the ban was extended to volleyball – the nation's most popular sport.

Since then, men and women can no longer watch even televised matches in public areas together, and attempting to do so can lead to arrests.

The #Watch4Women campaign is leaning on the International Volleyball Federation (FIVB) to penalize Iran for its discriminatory law.

Minky Worden, Director of Global Initiatives at HRW, says that if women cannot attend matches, Iran should not be allowed to host international games. The Iranian Volleyball Federation hosted six international matches in 2015, from which women and girls were excluded as spectators – a policy that goes against women's rights, the FIVB's own constitution and the Olympic Charter.

'Cheering for your team is a basic human right,' Darya Safai, a spokesperson for the group Let Iranian Women Enter Their Stadiums, told Swedish news agency TT.

For her, the volleyball campaign is a way to tackle the wider issue of gender discrimination in Iran. ■

Kelsi Farrington

deserted farmhouse make contact with an acerbic, restless spirit called Nil who promises them the answer to life, the universe and Haile Selassie's socks. Through the moonless night that stretches over the next year's worth of magazines, Nil proceeds to feed them snippets, insights and gags gleaned from multiple reincarnations, touching along the way on Teddy Roosevelt, Joe Stalin, the Indian emperor Asoka, Albert Einstein, George W Bush and the African warrior queen Nzinga, among many others. The cartoonist Brick added his own satirical

Introducing... Freddy Lim

Talk about unlikely... Who would have imagined that a tattooed heavy-metal musician would break the stale stand-off in Taiwanese politics between the KMT, which pushes for reunification with China, and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which is neither democratic nor progressive.

But in elections on 16 January, Lim and his New Power Party broke through, with six seats. The old Kuomintang-based KMT was routed in both legislative and executive elections; the new president is Tsai Ing-wen of the DPP, the first woman ever to hold the post.

New Power is trying to channel the voice of a younger generation of activists who most recently came to prominence in the Sunflower Movement, which challenged the highly unpopular KMT President Ma Ying-jeou's unscrupulous manoeuvrings to move the country further into China's autocratic orbit.

Lim made his name as lead vocalist with popular band Chthonic. Now 39, he has come a long way from his pro-unification student days to become a staunch defender of Taiwanese identity against the predations of an elitist mainland that suppressed the language and culture of his grandparents.

His move from heavy metal to politics came naturally. He explains that in contemporary Taiwan 'politicians are the most distrusted profession', while no-one distrusts musicians. So he tidied his wild black hair into a neat bun, hit the campaign trail and won a tightly fought race in the capital, Taipei. He hopes to eliminate the KMT, which he regards as an 'undemocratic, pre-modern party' that has dominated Taiwanese life for far too long. ■

Richard Swift



The Campaign Office of Freddy Lim

INDIA Mail-order abortion

Indian entrepreneur Mohan Kale has a solution for some of the 21.6 million women who resort to unsafe abortions every year.

His drug-sourcing company Kale Impex has teamed up with Dutch-based NGO Women on Web. They enable women in those countries where terminations are illegal – or highly restricted – to access painless

medical abortions.

It's a service in great demand. They receive more than 2,000 inquiries every week, from places as diverse as Kenya, Northern Ireland, Brazil and Poland.

Kale knows the stakes are high. 'Many times, in the absence of proper means, desperate women consume toxic chemicals like caustic soda to pull off an abortion,' he told *The Guardian*. 'As a supplier, I am always running against time to get the drug where it is needed.'

The two pills required for a medical abortion are mifepristone and misoprostol. Despite many medical studies that prove they are safe to use, access to the pills is restricted in many countries. But they are legal in India and easily available with a doctor's prescription.

A woman can apply for the pills online. First, a Dutch doctor approves the request subject to a review of answers about her medical history and pregnancy. A prescription is then sent to Kale's company, in the city of Nagpur, from where the pills are posted at a cost of \$97; if the woman can't pay, the pills will still be sent. ■

Cristiana Moisesescu

twopennorth.

Doubtless its humour was a taste that few readers acquired, but on rereading the complete series (which you too can do if you have an idle 15 minutes at nin.tl/EtherStreetcomplete) I did find myself chuckling a few times, which is not something I often do when trawling the **NI** archive. Is there anything worse than someone who laughs at his own jokes? Presumably, yes – someone who thrusts them upon an unsuspecting public for a second time. ■

Chris Brazier

**Western Sahara's
unsung fight**

**The face behind
the PKK story**



BURKINA FASO

Golden goal for child miners

Child miners are finding an unlikely escape from goldmines, through football.

Burkina Faso is experiencing a 21st-century gold rush, which is drawing more and more children into mining. More than 20,000 children in the West African country are employed in the gold sector, which is made up of mostly unregulated artisanal mines. The work is dangerous and often deadly. Labouring up to 12 metres below ground, in suffocating darkness, children are often trapped when mines collapse.

But for families in Burkina Faso, employment opportunities are scarce. The collapse in the global price of cotton has savaged the country's steady cotton production industry, leaving thousands out of work. Gold is now Burkina's top export, worth \$1.52 billion.

'I can fill up to four or five bags a day with rocks,' says Ansonzu Hawma, who started mining four years ago when he



Rebecca Cooke

was 13 years old. 'If there is any gold in the bags, we sell it; then I make some money.'

Ansonzu has never been to school and, like many children his age, the mines were his only option. Every franc he earns, he sends back to his family in the village near Dori, in the north of the country. They rely on his income for survival. 'They have nothing,' he explains. 'No food to live.'

Groups in Burkina Faso are trying to draw children away from this dangerous work, using football. Africa's favourite sport, it is universally loved

by the child miners.

One organization, Coaching for Hope, offers young miners football-skills training, followed by literacy classes. Ansonzu, wearing a football shirt caked in dust, is one of the boys taking part.

These sessions cannot make up for a lost education. But they do offer an alternative to the mines, and encourage children to return to learning. UN statistics show that in developing countries, every year spent in education can boost future income by 10 per cent. ■

Rebecca Cooke

NIGERIA

Innocents detained

For a year, Ayuba Ijai feared he might never see his family again. First, he was held hostage for months by the dreaded Boko Haram terrorists, and then government soldiers detained him for nearly a year, on suspicion of

being a Boko Haram member.

The 30-year-old was abducted in 2014 after returning to his village Mildu in Adamawa State, to help his parents with farming. He was sick when the group attacked and could not flee. Captured along with 24 others, he was forced to convert to Islam or be killed. They were all locked up in a room, with

guards stationed outside.

Three months later, he escaped when government forces liberated the town. However, a few hours after getting home to Maiduguri, the Borno State capital, soldiers stormed his neighbourhood and whisked Ayuba away. They said he was a Boko Haram member, and for 10 months he was detained and denied contact with the outside world.

Insurgents Boko Haram are responsible for the deaths of over 20,000 people and displacement of two million others in northeastern Nigeria. But since the Boko Haram war intensified in 2011, the Nigerian military has also been caught up in a web of serious human rights violations. An Amnesty International report last June detailed 7,000 deaths in detention and over 1,000 extrajudicial killings – reports denied by then-President Goodluck Jonathan.

Despite current President Muhammadu Buhari's stated resolve to clamp down on human rights abuses by soldiers, problems continue. After an attack, soldiers go into a neighbourhood and arbitrarily arrest people, mostly youths. Also, anyone who refuses to be part of Civilian JTF, the youth vigilante group assisting the military, are treated

Scratchy Lines by Simon Kneebone



PAKISTAN

Living in fear

Pakistani Christians who are charged under the country's blasphemy laws are living in hiding – even after being found innocent.

Under the laws, insulting Islam can be punished by death. Critics argue that the laws are being used to settle petty grievances and that Christians are disproportionately represented among defendants.

Even after Christians are acquitted, they continue to face hardship. Many leave their home areas and live in fear that extremists will track them down. Since 1990, at least 65 people have died in cases linked to blasphemy in Pakistan, although no judicial execution has ever taken place.

Rubina Bibi and her family were forced into hiding five years ago. A Christian from Ali Pur Chattha town in the Punjab province, she fled after being accused of blasphemy by a man who witnessed her arguing with a local woman who had allegedly sold her rancid butter. Bibi was held in prison

for months with her one-year-old baby while the case was being decided.

Since being acquitted, she and her husband are living in Islamabad. Still in hiding, they struggle to feed their children.

'We spend our wages on food and can hardly manage,' she says. 'My children don't have clothes. What can we do?'

Pakistan's blasphemy laws were established in 1860, under British rule. Until 1986, only 15 prosecutions were brought, according to figures from the Center for Research and Security Studies. But after military ruler Zia-ul-Haq expanded the scope to include offences such as insulting the prophet Muhammad – for which the death penalty was introduced – cases have surged.

Nonetheless, there is some hope for reform since Pakistan's Supreme Court ruled in late 2015 that suggesting revisions to the blasphemy laws does not, in itself, violate the law. But the religious Right remains stiffly opposed. ■

Rizwan Syed

Reasons to be cheerful

Indigenous land mapped

Despite indigenous people claiming ownership of more than half the world's land, they legally hold just 18 per cent, according to the Rights and Resources Initiative. But LandMark, a new online mapping tool that tracks the legal status of land, will now boost the efforts of communities working to secure claims in the face of competition from industrial agriculture and extractive industries.



Tigers and people coexist

The first big-cat reserve in India that did not evict local tribes has seen tiger numbers almost double since 2010, according to the National Tiger Conservation Authority. The rate of increase at BRT Tiger Reserve, Karnataka, home to the Soliga people, is far higher than the national average. Indigenous rights group Survival International say its success contradicts government policy to dispossess people in order to protect tigers.

Uruguay goes green

In less than 10 years, Uruguay has transformed its energy sector from fossil-fuel dependency to a system based on renewables. The country now generates 95 per cent of its energy from renewable sources – mostly from wind and solar. As well as cutting carbon emissions, its diverse energy mix has brought down energy prices and reduced power cuts.

Benin stays free

Thomas Boni Yayi, Benin's President, has resisted the temptation to change the constitution to stand for a third term. Given Paul Kagame's recent extension



to his tenure in Rwanda and civil unrest in Burundi since Pierre Nkurunziza did the same last June, Yayi's decision to step down made February elections something to celebrate.

Tom Lawson

Sahara Reporters



as Boko Haram members.

This has led to an upsurge in the number of innocent people detained.

'These cases fit a pattern of human rights violations,' says Amnesty's Netsanet Belay. 'The military have routinely arbitrarily arrested people, and detained them without access to their families and lawyers or without them ever being brought before a court.'

Ayuba was finally released in December 2015 along with 129 others, after their detention was exposed by investigative news agency icirnigeria.org. He says he was treated better by the military than by Boko Haram, but he was never happy as all he wanted was to go home.

He is now still trying to settle back into the community and deal with the stigma that the soldiers foisted on him. ■

Samuel Malik

NETHERLANDS

Ocean litter-pick

An ambitious project designed to rid the world's oceans of plastic is due to begin its first test in open waters.

Over the coming months, researchers from the Ocean Clean Up will place a 100-kilometre-long floating barrier 23 kilometres off the Dutch coastline.

This method has the potential to revolutionize current clearance efforts of our seas, which are home to vast floating garbage dumps that cover several million kilometres.

Rather than seeking out the plastic, the floating barriers will allow ocean currents to deliver it.

During the test, the barrier, equipped with motion sensors and surveillance, will monitor the litter-pulling impact of rough seas and strong currents. If successful, a second trial will be launched in Japan towards the end of 2016.

The brainchild of Dutch entrepreneur Boyan Slat, the project speaks to a long-running concern of environmentalists. Slat raised over \$2 million for research in 2014 – the most successful non-profit crowdfunded project in history. ■

theoceancleanup.com
Beulah Maud Devaney



'Our friends'

VANESSA BAIRD takes a look at the 'special relationship' between Saudi Arabia and the West.

Deputy Crown Prince
Mohammad bin Salman
(left) is responsible for
bombing Yemen; his
cousin Crown Prince
Mohammad bin Nayef
(right) is in charge of
executions.



Payez Nureldine/Getty

'Disgraceful!' exploded the parliamentarian.

What appalled British MP Daniel Kawczynski was that his country was about to cancel a \$8.4-million deal to modernize Saudi Arabia's prison system amid concerns about the country's worsening human rights.

A betrayal, in the eyes of Kawczynski, the Conservative member who has chaired the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Saudi Arabia.

And up to then, last October, such an event was virtually unheard of. Saudi Arabia is our friend, is the mantra that has for decades rung out from corridors of power in Britain, the US, Canada and Australia.

Never mind the public executions, the medieval floggings, lack of even the most basic rights for women. Never mind that citizens of this oil-rich Gulf state have their daily lives controlled by brutal secret and religious police, and a legal system based on regal whim rather than rule of law. Or that Saudi Arabia is one of the world's last remaining absolute monarchies and effectively a dictatorship. Or that it produced most of the 9-11 terrorists.¹

Saudi Arabia is our friend.

Security smoke and mirrors

If you believe the British government, it's all about keeping safe: 'The reason we have the relationship is our own national security,' said David Cameron recently. 'There was one occasion since I've been prime minister where a bomb that would have potentially blown up over Britain was stopped because of intelligence we got from Saudi Arabia... For me ... our people's security comes first.'²

It's also conveniently secret. There exists a Memorandum of Understanding between Britain and Saudi Arabia on security. But despite a number of Freedom of Information requests, we are not allowed to know its contents. Australia too has a secret pact.^{3,4}

US Secretary of State John Kerry recently confirmed his country's ongoing support for Saudi military intervention in Syria and in Yemen. 'We have made it clear that we stand with our friends in Saudi Arabia.'⁵ Canada's

Minister for Foreign Affairs, *Stéphane Dion*, recently described Saudi Arabia as 'an important partner in efforts to counter terrorism [and] to find a political solution in Syria.'⁶

Oil, guns and money

Something else underpins the special relationship. It's been called 'the prosperity agenda'.

Historically Saudi's prodigious quantities of cheap oil helped power Western economic growth. Today, other fuel sources, such as shale, are being developed and, hit by falling oil prices, Saudi petrol revenue is not what it was.

But that has not affected the kingdom's legendary spending on weapons. In 2014 it became the world's biggest buyer.⁷ In 2015 it was expected to purchase \$9.8 billion worth of weaponry, boosting the profits of the US, British, French and Canadian arms industries especially. Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen as well as Syria produced more orders in the past year, \$1 billion worth of US bombs alone between July and September.⁸ (See 'Arming up', page 17.)

With its undiversified economy, Saudi is a big importer of goods and services in general. Beef, barley and passenger vehicles from Australia; food, healthcare and engineering from New Zealand/Aotearoa.^{9,10} The kingdom provides thousands of well-paid jobs for Western expats. Canadian universities recently caused a storm at home by undertaking to set up men-only branches in Saudi Arabia.¹¹

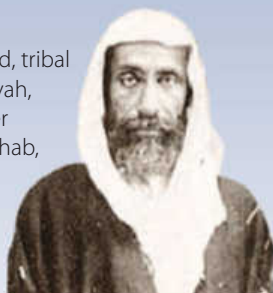
Rich Saudi princes and business owners (often the same thing) are valued customers of financial services in London and New York. Extra secrecy can be made to prevail. For example, you can find out how much sovereign debt China holds in US dollars. Saudi's holdings are a state secret, both in the US and the kingdom.¹²

The Saudi ambassador to London, Mohamed bin Nawwaf bin Abdulaziz, was less coy when he wrote an open letter complaining about negative attitudes displayed towards his country in parliament and in the media. He valued

Saudi Arabia – a brief history

The first Saudi state

In 1744 Muhammad ibn Saud, tribal ruler of the town of Ad Diriyah, joins forces with the preacher Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, founder of the Wahhabi movement, a radical form of Islam. The first Saudi state is established and gains control over much of the Arabian peninsula.



Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab

Ottoman domination

Worried about growing Saudi power, the Ottoman Sultan, Mustafa IV, sends his sons to rout the ruling Al Saud family in 1818. The family reassert their power in 1824, albeit in the limited region of Najd. Their rule is contested by the Al Rashid family, a rivalry that continues until the latter drive the Al Saud into exile in 1891.

The Arab revolt

The Ottoman Empire retains overall control, but tribal leaders rule at local level. In 1916, one of these, the Sharif of Mecca (Hussein bin Ali), is encouraged by Britain and France to lead a pan-Arab revolt against the Ottomans. The Ottoman troops are kept occupied, helping to secure the Empire's defeat in World War One. The victorious British and French renege on their promises to the Sharif of Mecca and shift their support to the Al Saud.

Saudi 'private business investments' in the country at \$128 billion.¹³

The tremendous wealth of the Al Saud dynasty secures the soft power of cultural influence too. Oxford University, SOAS and the London School of Economics are among many recipients in Britain; Melbourne, Griffith and University of Western Sydney in Australia; while in the US, Yale Law School recently received \$10 million from a Saudi donor.^{14,4}

Saudi cash flows into new mosques and community centres; one estimate suggests that \$100 billion has been spent promoting hardline Wahhabism abroad.¹⁵

But perhaps the most egregious bit of influence peddling occurred in the UN, when the British and Saudi Arabian governments agreed to swap votes to ensure that Saudi got a place on the influential UN Human Rights Council, which it now chairs.¹⁶ (See interview with Julian Assange, page 26.)

Changes at the top

For decades Saudi Arabia attracted only occasional interest from the international media.

Then, in early 2015, King Abdullah died and was succeeded by his 79-year-old brother Salman. It soon became clear that it was not the ailing Salman who was in charge, but his photogenic 29-year-old son, Mohammad bin Salman, acting as both Defence Minister and Deputy Crown Prince. He is variously described as a 'pop idol' prince – a hit with young Saudis – and 'the most dangerous man in the world'. Unlike many Saudi princes he was educated not abroad but within the kingdom.

In March, MbS (as he is known) ordered the bombing of neighbouring Yemen, in a bid to oust Shi'a Houthi rebels and to reinstall the Sunni former leader Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi. Estimated to have cost 6,000 lives, the heavy bombardment of civilian targets (including hospitals) has produced near-famine and brought condemnation from international charities and human rights groups.

Under King Salman's rule, repression within Saudi Arabia has intensified too; executions in 2015 were the highest in 20 years. Then early

this year, 47 'terrorists' were executed in one day, including the prominent Shi'a cleric Nimr al-Nimr. This provoked outrage within Shi'a communities across the world, but especially Iran, where protesters set fire to the Saudi embassy in Tehran.

The effect of the Iranian reaction has been to rally Saudi's Sunni majority population around a leadership that is adept at exploiting sectarianism for political gain.

Saudi's Shi'a population have long been discriminated against. Economically marginalized, they are excluded from positions of state. Saudi children are taught in school that Shi'a are non-believers. The regime claims that Saudi's Shi'a communities are loyal to Iran, though experts say there is little evidence of this.

Safa Al Ahmad, who made a film about the 2011 protests in her home town of Qatif calling for the release of political prisoners, says that the mood in Shi'a communities today is one of fear: 'The executions came as a shock. There are over 300 political prisoners. People are thinking: will they now go ahead and execute people like crazy? What will stop them? There was such a lot of high-level involvement [internationally] to stop this happening and it made no difference.'

She adds: 'It seems the government is not interested in a political solution. In the past, someone from the government would try and reach out to the people of the Eastern Province, would make an appearance. That is not the case now.'

'The decision-making is in a far tighter circle than it used to be. Many more people used to be involved before and knew what was going on.'

Saudi social media is abuzz with rumours of strife within the royal family, centring on MbS.

While talking to *The Economist* about his plans for a neoliberal overhaul – including privatization of the state oil company, ARAMCO – the king's son sounded like he was taking sole charge of the economy too.¹⁷

Selling arms to Saudi Arabia does not keep anybody safe. It increases the risk of terror attacks and worsens the refugee crisis

Saudi Arabia is born

Abdul Aziz bin-Saud resumes the fight with the Al Rashid, using the Ikhwan, a Wahhabist-Bedouin tribal army. In 1921, the Al Rashid are defeated. Abdul Aziz annexes northern Arabia. The British recognize Abdul Aziz's enlarged realm in the Treaty of Jeddah. Ikhwan warriors want to press on into the British protectorates of Transjordan, Iraq and Kuwait. When Abdul Aziz refuses, they revolt and are defeated in the 1930 Battle of Sabilla. In 1932 the two kingdoms of Hejaz and Najd are united as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.



King Abdul Aziz

Opulence and uprising

In 1938 vast reserves of oil are discovered along the coast of the Persian Gulf; to be extracted by US oil company ARAMCO. King Saud comes to the throne in 1953. Oil provides Saudi Arabia with wealth and political leverage but extravagance leads to foreign debt. Oil workers organize and riot. Saudi army officers plot a coup. Saud is deposed in favour of his half-brother Faisal with US backing in 1964.



King Faisal

A kingdom in trouble

Behind Saudi Arabia's more aggressive stance is fragility. The Saudi economy is in trouble. This year it faces a \$98-billion budget deficit.¹⁸ The oil price has collapsed – slipping to below \$30 a barrel. For its existing budget to work, Saudi needed a price of \$100 per barrel. Austerity measures have begun. These are anxious times for a regime used to throwing money at all problems.

The war in Yemen is costing Saudi Arabia \$6 billion a month, with the Houthis showing little sign of giving up.¹⁹ The West's recent *rapprochement* with Iran and lifting of sanctions has rattled Riyadh. It must be galling for the Al Saud, given the years and billions spent on buying the West.

Then there is the threat posed by Islamic State. Last year saw 15 attacks by IS militants on Saudi soil, including one on a Shi'a mosque killing 23 people. Self-acclaimed IS caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has vilified the Al Saud, calling them hypocrites who are betraying Islam.²⁰ It's ironic: the ruling family owes its legitimacy to the puritanical form of fundamentalist Islam called Wahhabism and uses it to maintain its power. But both al-Qaeda and, now, Islamic State are the ideological products, the natural offspring, of Saudi Wahhabism.²¹

The Saudi regime is often accused of funding terrorism, if not directly at least ideologically or through its mosques. IS is a proscribed organization in Saudi Arabia and it's illegal for Saudi nationals to go abroad to fight for it. But how much public support exists is hard to tell. A 2014 survey showed about five per cent of Saudis supporting IS, but after the Paris attacks, Saudi Arabia was the overwhelming source of tweets siding with the killers.^{20,22}

According to Saudi expert Toby Matthiesen: 'Saudi Arabia is particularly vulnerable to Islamic State because their ideologies are very similar; a lot of people in the country sympathize with its broader aims, especially its anti-Shi'a, anti-Iran stance. It's a double-edged sword. The government has been stoking this anti-Shi'a fire for a long time and people believe it.'

Then, here comes a group whose aim is to kill all the Shi'a and there are people who think this is a good idea.'

Meanwhile, the announcement by the Defence Minister that the kingdom was to lead a coalition of 34 Muslim states to fight terrorism is dismissed by most – including some of those named – as a publicity stunt. The coalition, significantly, did not include either Shi'a-led Iraq or Iran.

So the idea that Saudi Arabia is a reliable ally for the West rests on some pretty shaky assumptions: that Saudi Arabia is maintaining stability in the region; that it is genuinely committed to cracking down on Islamist terrorism; and that it is ideologically capable of doing so.

What can the West do?

Stop supplying arms for a start. Belgium and Sweden have, respectively, refused and cancelled lucrative sales.²³

Following a damning UN report, showing that civilians are deliberately targeted and starved by the Saudi coalition in Yemen, the Canadian government is under increased pressure to justify its \$15 billion armoured vehicles deal.²⁴ In the US, senators are demanding greater oversight on arms sales to Saudi Arabia.²⁵ In Britain, a cross-party group of MPs is calling for a suspension, while, at the time of writing, European MEPs are due to vote on an EU-wide arms embargo to Saudi Arabia. Vested interests remain powerful, but the fact that major arms-supplying nations, like Britain, are breaking national and international law by supplying munitions for use against civilians in Yemen, might help focus the mind.

There is always a strong moral argument against selling arms. But in the case of Saudi



Boycott and murder

ARAMCO is nationalized and in support of Egypt's 1973 War with Israel; an oil embargo is imposed in the US and Europe. OPEC agrees a big oil-price hike. King Faisal is assassinated by his nephew in 1975. King Khalid comes to power and ties with the US are strengthened again.

Islamism arises

The 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran rattles the Saudi regime; anti-government riots take place. Islamist extremists seize the Grand Mosque in Mecca, angered by what they see as the corruption and un-Islamic nature of the Saudi regime. The militants are massacred. The royal family enforces stricter observance of traditional and Islamic norms. King Khalid dies in 1982 and is succeeded by King Fahd, who maintains close ties with the US and buys billions' worth of arms from Britain. In conjunction with the CIA, Saudi Arabia funds and supports the Mujahedin fighting Soviet occupation in Afghanistan.

Ensaf Haidair, wife of blogger Raif Badawi, campaigns for his freedom.



Ryan Remiorz/PA Images

To take it further...

CAMPAIGNS

Amnesty International
amnesty.org.uk amnesty.org.au
Human Rights Watch hrw.org
Reprieve reprieve.org.uk
Campaign Against Arms Trade
caat.org.uk
Project Ploughshares
ploughshares.ca

RESOURCES

Muted Modernists by Madawi Al-Rasheed (Hurst, 2015)
Saudi Arabia: kingdom in peril by

Paul Aarts and Carolien Roelants (Hurst, 2015)
The Other Saudis by Toby Mattheisen (Cambridge University Press, 2015)
Mecca: the sacred city by Ziauddin Sardar (Bloomsbury, 2014)
On Saudi Arabia by Karen Elliott House (Alfred A Knopf, 2012)
Saudi's Secret Uprising by Safa Al Ahmad (BBC, 2014)
nin.tl/Saudi-uprising-YouTube
Middle East Eye
middleeasteye.net
Al-Monitor al-monitor.com

Arabia, there are strong strategic and security reasons too.

The kingdom's armed-to-the-teeth aggression is destabilizing the region. The proxy wars it is fighting with Iran in Syria and Yemen are wreaking havoc, writes conflict expert Alastair Crooke on page 28. Saudi is arming and supporting the most extreme groups in Syria (Jaysh al-Islam, for example). It is using sectarianism as a political tool, to stoke

up extremist sentiment in the region. This plays right into the hands of groups like IS. Al-Qaeda too has been given a new lease of life in Yemen, thanks to the Saudi intervention.

Whatever David Cameron says, selling arms to Saudi Arabia does not keep anybody safe. It increases the risk of terror attacks and worsens the refugee crisis. Ultimately, it's self-defeating.

Western supporters of the Saudi regime often say that they can more effectively raise concerns about human rights if they have a friendly relationship with the perpetrator. If that is what they've been doing, they've been rubbish at it.

If Western leaders really do want to be friends with Saudi Arabia then why not extend a hand of friendship to the people of the country? How about reaching out to those imprisoned modernizers, described in Madawi Al-Rasheed's article (see page 18), who are asking for so little: just the basic freedoms most of us take for granted.

The hand could be stretched to the thoughtful young blogger Raif Badawi, 50 lashes into a life-threatening 1,000-lash sentence for expressing his considered and moderate opinions, now collected into a moving book entitled *1,000 lashes: because I say what I think*.

Maybe that's the sort of Saudi friend to have and defend. ■

1 Amnesty International nin.tl/saudi-abuses **2** The Independent nin.tl/squalid-deal **3** The Independent nin.tl/secret-security-pact **4** The Saturday Paper nin.tl/secret-australia-deal **5** Alternet nin.tl/US-stands-by-KSA **6** Middle East Eye nin.tl/Canada-Saudi-deal **7** Middle East Eye nin.tl/Saudi-biggest-arms-buyer **8** Middle East Eye nin.tl/US-supplies-bombs **9** Australian Government nin.tl/trade-saudi-arabia **10** Al Arabiya nin.tl/NZ-trade-KSA **11** The Globe and Mail nin.tl/men-only-colleges **12** Zero Hedge nin.tl/saudis-secret-US-holdings **13** The Telegraph nin.tl/saudi-ambassadors-letter **14** The New Statesman nin.tl/university-funding-shame **15** Huffington Post nin.tl/Saudi-Wahhabism-Islamist-terrorism **16** Counterpunch nin.tl/bribery-UN-human-rights **17** The Economist nin.tl/interview-with-MbS **18** The Guardian nin.tl/saudi-economic-reform **19** Al-Monitor nin.tl/saudi-failing-in-Yemen **20** The Guardian nin.tl/ISIS-and-Saudi **21** The New York Times nin.tl/Saudi-an-**IS** **22** Euronews nin.tl/IS-supporters-in-Saudi **23** Mintpress nin.tl/Belgium-bans-weapons-sales **24** The Globe and Mail nin.tl/Canadian-arms-deal-pressure **25** Foreign Policy nin.tl/US-arms-shipments-review



Osama bin Laden

The anger of al-Qaeda

After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 King Fahd agrees to the stationing of US troops on Saudi soil. This infuriates Islamists, including Osama bin Laden. Al-Qaeda carries out spectacular attacks in Africa and the US in 2001. Saudi Arabia refuses to back the US-led invasion of Iraq. In 2003 al-Qaeda ups its terrorist activity in Saudi Arabia. The new King, Abdullah, promises a policy of moderate reform and economic liberalization.



King Abdullah

Arab Spring (unsprung)

The Arab Spring protests of 2011 produce an increase in welfare spending in Saudi Arabia, accompanied by a political crackdown. Saudi troops are sent to support the royal family in Bahrain and King Abdullah helps Tunisia's deposed president Zine el Abidine ben Ali and Egypt's Hosni Mubarak. In 2015 Abdullah dies and his brother, Salman, becomes king.

Arming up... and not just for show

Saudi fighter pilot prepares for action over Yemen. The targeting of schools, hospitals and even wedding parties, has brought international condemnation. Munitions supplied by Britain and others have been used.

For many years Saudi Arabia has spent billions on weapons systems – yet rarely put them to use. During Desert Storm (1990–91) there were reports that the Saudi military didn't know how to operate much of its own high-tech equipment.

All that has changed. In March 2015, Saudi Arabia started a ferocious bombardment of Yemen, heading a coalition of Sunni-dominated Arab states bent on crushing Yemen's Shi'a Houthi rebels, who had gained control of the capital, Sana'a.

The impact on the people of Yemen has been devastating:

DAMAGE DONE

- During 2015 more than 5,700 people were killed, about half of them civilians, according to the UN.¹
- Markets, factories, houses, schools and health clinics have all been targets – including a hospital run by the charity Médecins Sans Frontières and a school funded by Oxfam.²
- Cluster bombs banned by international treaty have been dropped from Saudi aircraft.³
- By December 2015, 1.5 million Yemenis had been internally displaced, and more than 7.6 million – almost a third of the population – were in desperate need of food aid. Intensive bombing and a Saudi blockade starving Yemenis of vital supplies are largely to blame.⁴

BONANZA

The bombing of Yemen has been a bonanza for Saudi Arabia's arms trading partners.

Chief among those are **Britain** (which accounts for 36% of arms sales to the kingdom), the **US** (35%) and **France** (5%).⁴

Canada has a profitable **US\$15 billion** contract to supply light armoured vehicles.⁵

Between 2010 and 2014 Saudi Arabia was already buying four times more arms than in the period 2005–09.⁴ In 2014 it became the world's largest arms buyer.

The **British** government licensed almost **\$8.3 billion** of arms to the regime between May 2010 and May 2015, including Hawk and Typhoon fighter jets, machine guns, teargas, bomb components, military vehicles, and targeting equipment.⁶

As the bombing of Yemen escalated in March 2015, so did arms sales to Saudi Arabia:

- In July 2015 **Britain** transferred to Saudi Arabia **\$234 million** worth of Paveway IV precision-guided 500-pound bombs originally earmarked for its own Royal Air Force.⁷
- In six months between March and September 2015, **Britain** issued **37** arms export licences for transfers to Saudi Arabia.⁸

- In October the **US** approved an **\$11.25 billion** deal for up to four Lockheed Martin warships for Saudi Arabia, along with weapons, training and logistics support.⁹

- In November the **US** State Department approved the sale of **\$1.29 billion** worth of air-to-ground munitions such as laser-guided bombs and 'general purpose' bombs with guidance systems.¹⁰

The reasons given to legislators and the public for approving such sales was the need for Saudi Arabia to replace stocks that had been used up on 'counter-terrorism'.

PROTEST

Human rights campaigners and others are not impressed. In the US, Human Rights Watch called on Congress to reject bomb sales to Saudi Arabia.

'The US government is well aware of the Saudi-led coalition's indiscriminate air attacks that have killed hundreds of civilians in Yemen since March,' said HRW spokesperson Joe Stork. 'Providing the Saudis with more bombs is a recipe for greater civilian deaths, for which the US will be partially responsible.'¹⁰

Amnesty International called for a suspension of further sales of aerial munitions after it was shown that British-made missiles sold to the kingdom had been used for attacking civilian targets, in violation of International Humanitarian Law.¹¹

An investigation by leading lawyers Philippe Sands QC, Andrew Clapham and Blinne Ní Ghrálaigh came to the conclusion that the British government was breaking national, EU and international law in supplying arms to Saudi Arabia for use in Yemen.¹²

Meanwhile, Andrew Smith of the British Campaign Against Arms Trade said:

'There must be an immediate embargo on all arms sales to the regime, and an end to the uncritical political support they are given. How many more people will be tortured and killed before the UK government finally says enough is enough?'

The British people seem to agree. Research by Opinium LLP has found that 62% of adults oppose arms sales to Saudi Arabia, with only 16% supporting them.¹³ ■

1 Al Jazeera nin.tl/Yemen-famine **2** [trunews.com nin.tl/Saudi-arms-drops](http://trunews.com/nin.tl/Saudi-arms-drops)
3 The Guardian nin.tl/cluster-bombs **4** SIPRI nin.tl/arms-trends **5** Middle East Eye nin.tl/Canada-Saudi-deal **6** CAAT nin.tl/UK-arms-export **7** Defense News nin.tl/British-bombs-Yemen **8** The Guardian nin.tl/UK-arms-scandal
9 RT nin.tl/Lockheed-warships **10** Human Rights Watch nin.tl/US-bomb-sales-Saudi **11** Amnesty International nin.tl/uk-cruise-missile-used **12** Amnesty International nin.tl/uk-gov-breaks-law **13** CAAT nin.tl/£4billion-arms-to-SA

Saudi activists – who are they

MADAWI AL-RASHEED examines the prospects and limits of activism in the absolute monarchy.



Dinendra Haria/PA Images

Waleed Abu al-Khair, a lawyer whose crime is to defend constitutional reformists and blogger Raif Badawi.

Fearing a domino effect from the Arab uprisings in 2011, the Saudi regime adopted multiple strategies to stifle dissent in the kingdom.

First it started using oil wealth to distribute millions of dollars in benefits, job opportunities and other welfare services. Then followed repression, leading to hundreds of peaceful activists for change being rounded up and put in prison. Some were flogged, others executed; many still face the death penalty.

By 2014 new anti-terrorism laws and royal decrees had criminalized practically all forms of dissent, including demonstrations, civil disobedience, criticizing the king or communicating with foreign media without government authorization.

Yet these measures have failed to mute a wide range of activists.

Under stifling conditions, activism has moved to the virtual world, taking advantage of the tremendous proliferation of social media in the kingdom.

While some of the activists have an overtly political agenda to transform the kingdom into a constitutional monarchy, or to overthrow the regime altogether, others have modest aspirations revolving around demands to improve living conditions under the present regime.

Filling prisons

Constitutional reformers are dissidents who are calling for an alternative political system

with an elected government, in which citizens are fully represented in a parliament. They want a truly independent civil society to defend human, political and civil rights.

This is a bold move in a country that does not allow any civil-society associations to exist without the permission or patronage of important princes.

Since 2009, the constitutional reformers have included Islamists and non-Islamists, coming together to call for political change. Many are lawyers, academics, professionals.

While continuing to pledge allegiance to the king, they wrote several petitions and collected signatures in support of their demands. But the regime considered these revolutionary. It insisted that the Qur'an is the constitution and a human-made one is against Islamic tradition as interpreted by the Wahhabi clerical establishment.

Swiftly the regime clamped down on the advocates of constitutional monarchy. In 2013 several well-known activists were sentenced to 10-15 years in prison in addition to bans on travel after their release.

The main figures targeted included judge Sulaiman al-Rushoudi, and the professors Abdullah al-Hamid and Muhammad al-Qahtani.

Abdullah al-Hamid challenged the government when he warned: 'Without a new culture of peaceful activism, people will move underground and erupt like a volcano.' His statement was seen as a call for demonstrations.

'Without a new culture of peaceful activism, people will move underground and erupt like a volcano'

and what do they want?

The regime quickly imprisoned even the lawyers defending constitutional reformists, including Waleed Abu al-Khair and Fawzan al-Harbi.

Young activists who circulated news about the trials of the reformists on social media were also imprisoned. By 2013, many reformists had been silenced.

But their political agenda survives among young online activists who use pseudonyms to remind audiences of the plight of the imprisoned dissidents. These hashtag activists regularly run internet campaigns to free the reformers and disseminate reports written by organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

In the fragmented scenario of activism in Saudi Arabia, the constitutional reformers have a clear political identity and a set of coherent political demands. Their activism has landed the majority of them in prison, but their lectures continue to inspire a generation of young Saudi activists, within the country or abroad.

More dangerous than jihadis

Under the pretext of fighting terrorism, the regime used the 2014 laws to send peaceful reformers to special courts that deal with jihadi terrorism. Although the reformers adopted peaceful means such as civil disobedience, sit-ins, and hunger strikes, they were regarded as perhaps more dangerous than violent jihadis as they offered a new political vision that appealed to many people.

Among those who were impressed by the peaceful 'Arab Spring' protests was Sheikh Salman al-Awdah, a popular veteran Salafi scholar. He had a long history of dissent that began with raising objections to the stationing of US troops on Saudi soil during the 1990 war with Iraq.

After several years in prison, he has re-emerged to preach. Occasionally he adopts a moderate dissenting voice and has called for fair treatment of prisoners of conscience. In March 2013, during the trials of the constitutional reformists, he circulated an open letter to the Minister of Interior (now Crown Prince) Muhammad bin Nayef, in which he said: 'There are no clear regulations to normalize how prisoners are treated' and calling for just trials 'without which people would eventually go to the *midan* [public square] if their demands to free political prisoners are not met'.

Like most Saudi activists, al-Awdah is active on Twitter. His lectures, video clips and sermons circulate widely, not only inside Saudi Arabia but also among Muslims around

the world. He has over 1.5 million followers; the regime watches such people carefully.

Hashtag youth

Other activists focus on issues like youth unemployment, low salaries, housing shortages, inadequate urban infrastructure, and pervasive corruption.

Many Saudis believe that their oil-rich country could do more to improve welfare services and distribute national wealth. They see their Gulf neighbours, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, enjoying a higher quality of life thanks to government provisions for education and health.

Saudi activists regularly post YouTube videos of crumbling urban infrastructure, poor school buildings and inadequate hospitals, especially in the peripheral regions outside the main cities.

Housing shortages in the vast desert kingdom are a regular cause of discontent, especially the confiscation and appropriation of land by senior royals.

Young citizens use the internet to highlight the barriers that encircle vast plots of land acquired by princes, dubbing the kingdom *mamlakat al-shubok*, the 'kingdom of barbed wires'. Occasionally, locals organize sit-ins to block government plans to clear land for development and prevent bulldozers from forcibly removing residents. Clashes over land in various regions have been caught and circulated via video clip.

This type of activity has the potential to strengthen local responses to corruption and injustice. It remains sporadic and unorganized due to the fierce repression faced by any leaders or organizers. But it might mature and develop into a hard-to-ignore grassroots movement.

Defiant women

Gender relations remain among the most oppressive in the world. But in recent years Saudi women have become bolder and more vocal in their demands for recognition and equality.



Salman al-Awdah, now a moderate dissenting voice, has 1.5 million followers on Twitter.



Riyadh resident Azza al-Shmasani takes part in a protest against the ban on women driving.

In December 2015, for the first time ever, Saudi women participated in municipal elections, as candidates and voters.

Although many are not impressed by the half-elected municipal councils, women activists such as Hatoun al-Fassi, who runs the Baladi (my country) campaign to introduce women to 'the culture of elections', have welcomed them. 'We are not accepting anything less than being acknowledged, or granted our full legal capacities and rights. The obstacles that women are facing are a reflection of women's place in society. We don't have an independent body of representation, we're not seen as autonomous, we are always seen next to a man,' she said.

The turn-out to register to vote was not high, perhaps because many Saudis are disillusioned with municipalities and the limited powers they have.

Women have yet to be granted the right to drive, despite several online campaigns calling upon the king to lift the ban. In 2013, women activists designated 26 October as a day to defy the ban. But they failed to attract a large cohort willing to take the risk. Several women who were courageous enough to drive, such as Wajihah al-Huwaider, Manal al-Sharif and Lujain al-Hithlul, were imprisoned. On 1 December 2014 Lujain al Hithlul drove her car from the United Arab Emirates with the intention of crossing the border to Saudi Arabia. She was arrested at the border and kept in prison for 73 days.

The campaign to drive continues. But the regime is keen to avoid a collision with conservative elements, as it needs their support domestically and at the international level. The regime relies heavily on the religious establishment for its legitimacy and does not want to antagonize it. There seems to be a pact in place between the princes and this religious establishment. The former are granted full freedom to deal with foreign affairs and the economy while the latter is in charge of domestic social, educational and judicial matters.

Organized and maligned

Perhaps the most politicized and best-organized dissidents are to be found among the Shi'a minority of the oil-rich Eastern province. Since the late 1970s, Shi'a activists have been more vocal in demanding real equality, cessation of bigoted religious *fatwas* against them, and full civil rights.

In 2011 clashes between security forces and Shi'a protesters led to 20 deaths among young activists who staged regular demonstrations in Qatif and Awamiyyah. There were also several deaths among security forces.

After several rounds of protest, many Shi'a clerics were imprisoned, the most famous being Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr who was accused

of orchestrating protest between 2011 and 2013. He received the death penalty, which was carried out earlier this year in a highly publicized day of execution that claimed the lives of 47 prisoners. His young nephew, Ali, arrested when he was 17 after participating in an anti-government protest, was sentenced to death by crucifixion and beheading in 2015.

Shi'a activism, which remains confined to Shi'a areas, is described by the government as an Iranian conspiracy against the Sunni kingdom and many Saudis accept this narrative. In the current wave of sectarianism sweeping the Arab world, it is difficult to see how Saudi Shi'a can overcome their isolation and build bridges with the rest of the country. Their intellectuals and political activists have tried to do so but their calls for real citizenship and equality have fallen on deaf ears. Neither the government nor substantial sections of society are ready to accept the Shi'a as full citizens, thus undermining national cohesion and threatening peaceful coexistence.

Given its fragmented, unorganized and sporadic nature, activism in Saudi Arabia may appear limited in its ability to instigate real political change. But there are signs that dissent is mounting and benefiting from new media to articulate visions and criticism of the regime.

The regime too uses the new media to intimidate, spread propaganda and undermine activists. Any observer of Saudi affairs cannot miss the heated debates that have migrated to the virtual world for lack of alternative platforms. Even disgruntled and side-lined princes have taken to Twitter to lament their marginalization. One such person, who goes by the name of Mujtahidd (@mujtahidd) circulates stories from within the tight circle of senior princes, exposing corruption and intrigues.

Current Saudi activism and dissent may lead nowhere. But there are clear signs that citizens have already moved beyond total obedience and acquiescence.

It may take a small incident to spark serious uncontrollable challenges to the leadership. Dissent can then erupt without the forces of repression being able to contain the outcome. ■

Madawi Al-Rasheed is a Saudi-born visiting professor at the London School of Economics. Her latest book is *Muted Modernists*, published by Hurst in 2015.



Executions, often held in public, are on the increase since King Salman came to power in 2015.

Saudi Arabia



The FACTS

1 People

Population: **27.7 million**¹
An estimated **9 million** are foreign workers.²

47% of the population is under 25¹

82% is urban¹

85-90% of Saudis are Sunni Muslim.
10-15% are Shi'a Muslim.¹

Life expectancy: **75 years**
(Male 72, Female 77)¹

\$52,300 – GDP per capita, 2014 estimate. (US \$54,629)¹

2 Education and jobs

87% of Saudis are literate.¹

Universities produce **250,000-300,000** graduates a year; over half are women.

171,000 Saudis are studying abroad, most in the US.^{3,4}

Almost **30%** of young Saudis (aged 15-24) are unemployed (**21%** of males, **55%** of females).¹

Only **12%** of Saudi women have jobs.⁵

Almost **60%** of Saudi jobs are held by foreigners. This includes nearly all service and private industry jobs.^{1,5}

3 Oil economy

9.7 million barrels of crude produced per day
(second only to Russia).¹

7.6 million barrels exported per day.
(No 1 exporter)¹

The petroleum sector provides **80%** of budget reserves and 90% of export earnings.¹

Saudi Arabia has **16%** of the world's oil reserves, the second largest of any country in the world after Venezuela.¹

Ghawar, the largest oil field, has enough oil to fill **4.7 million** Olympic swimming pools.⁶

4 Environment

10th largest CO₂ emitter in the world.¹

99.9% of the kingdom's electricity is generated from fossil fuels.

0.1% from renewables.¹

Saudi Arabia is one of the driest places on earth but water use is high:

Water use, per person per day:

Saudi Arabia **265** litres

Netherlands **121** litres

5 Rights

Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy and theocracy. Government and legislative council are appointed by the king, as are judges. Strict Islamic (sharia) law applies.¹

151 people were executed in 2015 (by November). That's 1 every 2 days, the highest since 1995.⁷

72% of those facing execution were sentenced for attending political

meetings, possessing drugs and other nonviolent offences.⁸

30,000 = estimated number of political prisoners⁹

0 = number of political parties¹

Gender

Women are treated as minors and prohibited from:

- Driving
- Opening a bank account
- Walking outside uncovered (only eyes and hands may be seen in many places)
- Going out in public unaccompanied by a male family chaperone or meeting non-family males in public
- Travelling abroad without permission of a male guardian.¹⁰

But in December 2015, for the first time in Saudi history, women voted and won seats in elections for local councils.

18 out of 2,100 council seats were won by women.

Male voters outnumbered female by **10 to 1** (1.3 million male and 130,000 female).

Most people did not vote at all.¹¹

Homosexuality is illegal and punishable by death.

Freedom of expression

More than **16.2 million** internet users (nearly 60% of the population). Mobile-phone penetration is higher than Spain's: **193** subscriptions per 100 people.¹

But:

400,000+ websites blocked by Saudi authorities.¹²
Broadcast media is **100%** government controlled.¹



Nearly half of Saudis are under 25.

Eric Lafforgue/Getty

¹ Central Intelligence Agency (US) 7 December 2015 nin.tl/CIA-factbook
² Arab News nin.tl/9m-expats ³ Paul Aarts, Carolien Roelants, *Saudi Arabia: a kingdom in Peril*, Hurst, 2015
⁴ Al-Araby nin.tl/saudi-students-abroad
⁵ Karen Elliott House, *On Saudi Arabia*, Vintage, 2013. ⁶ Business Insider nin.tl/facts-Saudi-Arabia ⁷ Amnesty International, nin.tl/saudi-executions
⁸ Reprieve, *Justice Crucified: The death penalty in Saudi Arabia*, 2015 nin.tl/Reprieve-report ⁹ Human Rights Watch nin.tl/Saudi-Arabia-Report ¹⁰ Times of India nin.tl/Saudi-women-not-allowed
¹¹ Al Jazeera nin.tl/first-Saudi-female-politicians ¹² Reporters Without Borders nin.tl/blocking-internet

Poverty in the land of black gold

'Rich Saudi' are words that seem to belong together. But PAUL AARTS and CAROLIEN ROELANTS highlight another, mainly hidden, reality.



Fayez Nureldine/Getty

In the online show *Mal3ob3lena* (Malob Aleyna or We are being cheated) an item entitled 'Poverty in Saudi Arabia' features several desperately poor people in one of the slums of Riyadh, five kilometres outside the city centre.

It's a scene of crowded dilapidated dwellings, filthy alleys – full of uncollected garbage – and ragged children playing, some barefoot.

A local imam tells us that kids are being sent out onto the street to sell drugs. Not only that, fathers encourage their daughters to go into sex work – simply as a means to survive.

The material in this film was sensitive enough to get the filmmakers put in jail a few weeks after it went online in 2011.

But campaigns launched on Twitter also drew attention to destitution in the land of black gold, like the one under the hashtag 'Salary doesn't meet my needs'. In the first two weeks of summer 2013 it got more than 10 million tweets.

The figures

Saudi Arabia is known for its huge oil reserves, for its super-rich elite who own palace-like mansions in the US, Spain and London.

But in terms of gross domestic product per capita (\$52,300) the kingdom is not as rich as its neighbours, such as Qatar (\$137,200), Kuwait (\$70,700), or the United Arab Emirates (\$66,300).

Income inequality is dramatic.

Saudi household income is around \$3,800 per month and the average Saudi family comprises six members.

According to the official statistics of the Ministry of Social Services, the poverty line stands at \$480 a month. One leading economist at the King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals in Dhahran has made a calculation of his own. 'The government's figures are not really reliable. I reckon that 35 per cent of the population has to get by with much less than \$533. They are poor.'

These figures were confirmed during recent interviews with economists in Riyadh.

Some people are very poor. They live in neglected provinces such as Asir, Jizan and Najran; but also in the big cities. Al-Suwaidi, al-Jarradiyah and al-Shimaisi (in Riyadh) and al-Karantina, al-Rowais and al-Salamah (in Jeddah) are slums that rival each other in notoriety,

An estimated 35% of the Saudi population are poor.

inhabited not just by extremely poor Saudis but also by foreign workers. According to some sources, the average foreign worker earns as little as \$266 a month.

Begging – mainly by fully covered women – is a common sight on the outskirts of the slums, on the roads to the city centre. In another YouTube film a Saudi woman, standing outside a charity organization, describes her situation. She lives in a cramped and decrepit house with four of her divorced daughters, each having four to seven children. The family's monthly income is \$372, while the rent has increased to \$298. She says: 'We want to eat and live like other human beings.'

Migrant workers, jobless Saudis

Unemployment forms a large part of the poverty problem. The official figures are relatively low: 11.7 per cent of men and 32.8 per cent for women. But, off the record, experts cite much higher rates. According to a senior official of the oil company ARAMCO (who wanted to remain anonymous) the unemployment rate is closer to 27 to 29 per cent, rising to 33 per cent among youths between 20 and 24 years and 38 per cent for 24 to 29-year-olds.

If all the 9 million or so foreign workers (about a third of the country's population) were sent home, the unemployment and poverty problem would be solved. In theory. But not really, because unemployed Saudis rarely possess the skills and drive to do the work foreigners do.

For many years now, the government has been trying to limit the number of foreigners and to make the workforce more Saudi. With little success so far, given it resolved a decade ago to reduce the proportion of foreigners to a fifth of the kingdom's population.

Since frustrated youth in Tunisia, Egypt and neighbouring Yemen took to the streets to try to topple their governments in 2011, various programmes have been launched – such as *Hafiz* (Stimulus) and *Liqat* (Encounter) – to link employers to Saudi jobseekers. Whoever enrolls in the *Hafiz* programme gets a monthly allowance of \$400 until they get a job. The *Nitaqat* (Zones) programme is specifically aimed at replacing foreign workers by Saudis.

In December 2015, *Saudi Gazette* reported that 1.7 million Saudis work in the private sector, making up 17 per cent of the workforce in this sector. More than twice as many work in the public sector.

Lingerie and Thatcherism

Thanks to gender inequality and strict cultural and religious rules of segregation, women remain underrepresented in the workforce. But their cause has been taken up by young entrepreneur Khalid al-Khodair, who set up the recruitment agency Glowork.

He started by recruiting women as sales staff for lingerie shops for women, which the government had allowed despite fierce resistance from the clergy. In a recent interview, al-Khodair proudly noted that the number of Saudi women employed in the private sector had increased from 48,000 in 2010 to 504,000 in 2015. Resistance by conservative families has evaporated as their daughters bring in much-needed salaries.

Despite Glowork's success, large sections of the Saudi population face – and will continue to face – dire conditions.

It is true that healthcare and education are free – though these services are often of a poor quality – and until recently, water, electricity and petrol were heavily subsidized.

But for ordinary Saudis things may be about to get worse. A new austerity budget has been announced to cut subsidies in response to a looming deficit caused by the sharp drop in the world oil price.

Ironically, this has already translated into a 50-per-cent increase in the price Saudis have to pay for petrol; soon water and electricity will go up, too.

These measures are likely to hit the poorest hardest – though in an interview with *The Economist*, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman said 'the 20 per cent of middle classes and lower, who benefit from subsidies' would be spared.

When asked whether his policy could be seen as a 'Thatcher revolution for Saudi Arabia', he answered, 'Most certainly'.

If so, it does not bode well for Saudi Arabia's have-nots. ■

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Kids are sent out to sell drugs. Fathers encourage their daughters to go into sex work – as a means to survive

The richest

'Too rich to pay' seems to be the motto of Saudi Arabia's elite.

*\$720 million – the sum owed by Saudi VIPs in unpaid electricity bills.¹

*\$1.2 million – the unpaid limo taxi bill left by Princess Maha Al-Ibrahim after a stay in Geneva.²

Of the country's 15,000 royals, around 2,000 tap into its oil wealth and own much of its business.³

The richest is Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Al Saud (net worth \$17.7 billion), owner of the Kingdom Holding Company, with stakes in Twitter, Citicorp, and swanky hotels.⁴

The poorest

Migrant workers from Asia and Africa are the poorest and most exploited. Take the recent case of Kasthuri Munirathinam, a maid from South India who had her hand cut off by her employer after she tried to escape 'harassment, torture and abysmal working conditions'. She had gone to Saudi Arabia to help pay off her family's debt and been promised \$180 a month. 'But she was not paid, she was barely given enough to eat and not even allowed to speak to her family,' said her sister.⁵ Human rights groups report many cases of physical and sexual abuse, withholding of wages, and slavery.⁶

Sources: **1** Aarts and Roelants, *Saudi Arabia* **2** WikiLeaks **3** The Independent nln.tl/princess-inside-info **4** Forbes nln.tl/prince-abta **5** Al Jazeera nln.tl/arm-cut-off **6** Human Rights Watch

Oil on the skids

The quiet power of oil and money has for decades enabled Saudi Arabia to buy silence and influence. But not for much longer, predicts NAFEEZ AHMED.



Within a year of being crowned king in 1932, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, founder of modern Saudi Arabia, had signed an exclusive concession with Standard Oil, run by the US oil giant Chevron.

In return, the US would enter a formal military alliance with the kingdom, to protect it from rivals. Thus was established a pattern of relationships that continues today: the West props up Saudi repression to maintain ‘stability’ – meaning access to regional oil and gas – while the Saudis use their oil wealth to buy protection wherever needed.

By 1944, Chevron brought in fellow oil majors Exxon, Mobil and Texaco to consolidate Standard into the Arabian American Oil Company, ARAMCO, which effectively functioned as a proxy for the US government in Saudi Arabia.¹

‘The best regime’

By 1971, British ambassador to Saudi Arabia William Morris described Saudi Arabia’s specific role as guarantor of regional ‘stability’ with candour: ‘Our narrow commercial interests are of lesser importance than the politico-strategic-economic interest to us of Saudi Arabia as a major supplier of oil to the West... however unsatisfactory, this is the best regime in Saudi Arabia we have, or can count on getting. There is little or nothing we can do to improve it, so we must make the best of what it is.’

The decision to accept Saudi Arabia as ‘the best regime’ to guarantee Western fossil-fuel interests in the Gulf lives on today. Its ISIS-like ideology and financing of terrorism continues to be largely ignored by Western governments.

According to a 2009 secret cable from then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, ‘donors in Saudi Arabia constitute the most significant

source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide’. The cable described Saudi Arabia as ‘a critical financial support base for al-Qaeda, the Taliban, LeT [Lashkar-e-Taiba], and other terrorist groups’ and said that Riyadh had only taken limited action to disrupt terror financing.²

This is nothing new. After 9/11, a joint Congressional inquiry into the attacks discovered a CIA memo confirming ‘incontrovertible evidence that there is support for these terrorists [9/11 hijackers Khalid Almidhar and Nawaf Alhamzi] within the Saudi government’. The memo was published as part of a report that had been unilaterally classified by the White House. The Obama administration has continued to rebuff repeated demands from the 9/11 families to declassify those pages.³

When British historian Mark Curtis, author of *Secret Affairs: Britain’s Collusion with Radical Islam*, submitted a Freedom of Information Act request to the UK Foreign Office for its assessment of terrorist funding from Saudi Arabia, he was told: ‘Disclosure of information is likely to prejudice relations between the UK and Saudi Arabia.’

Funding Islamist militancy is only one part of this equation. The other involves mobilizing oil wealth to buy silence, support and influence. In the US, much Saudi investment goes towards energy research to prolong the kingdom’s declining fossil-fuel resources. Tens of billions of dollars have gone to Stanford, Cornell, Texas A&M, UC Berkeley, CalTech, among others to develop technologies that can extract more oil per well, discover new reserves, and advance carbon capture methods that might permit continued fossil-fuel exploitation.⁴

But none of this has prevented Saudi Arabia’s oil empire from crumbling.

Getting high on their own supply – Saudi youths engage in a popular stunt of ‘sidewall skiing’. Oil exports are down while domestic consumption keeps rising.



Mohamed Alhwaity/Reuters

Oil collapse

The plummeting price of oil, down from \$115 in 2014 to under \$30 earlier this year, has hit oil-producing nations hard. Saudi Arabia could have chosen to reduce supply in a bid to push up the price, but instead kept the taps open to try to increase its global market share.

The world – and in particular the US – has been shifting away from Middle Eastern oil to sources from the Americas, including shale and tar sands. A spate of recent studies and forecasts shows that by mid-century, Saudi Arabia is destined to lose its dominance over global oil markets to other producers such as Canada and Venezuela. The prospect of parts of ARAMCO, Saudi's highly secretive national oil company, being sold off to the private sector, was raised earlier this year by Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

The kingdom is cagey about disclosing the scale of its reserves, but there are reports that it is running out of cheap oil. A study in the *Journal of Petroleum Science and Engineering* predicts that Saudi Arabia's oil production will peak then inexorably decline in 2028.⁵ And according to the Export Land Model created by Texas petroleum geologists, Saudi net oil exports have been in decline over the last decade.⁶ The geologists show that a major factor is rising domestic consumption.⁷

In 2012, Citigroup observed that Saudi electricity production is growing at about eight per cent a year.⁸ A quarter of the country's total fuel production is used domestically. At this rate Saudi Arabia's net oil exports could decline to zero by 2030.

During Paris COP21, Nour O Shihabuddin of ARAMCO confirmed that investing in

renewables for domestic energy consumption would free up more oil for export.⁹

Meanwhile, the money too is dwindling. In September last year, I reported that if Saudi Arabia's considerable cash reserves continued to deplete at the rate of about \$12 billion a month, by late 2018 the kingdom's reserves could hit just \$200 billion (compared with \$650 billion at the end of 2015). This would trigger capital flight, and could lead to bankruptcy.¹⁰

A month later, the IMF provided a more radical forecast, saying that on its current course, Saudi Arabia would deplete its cash reserves and go bankrupt in just five years. Adjustment plans 'are currently insufficient to address the large fiscal challenge,' warned the agency.¹¹

Imperial overstretch

As Saudi Arabia's economic and energy security has declined, its resort to military expansionism has intensified, resulting in hundreds of millions of dollars of support to extremist rebels in Syria, a prolonged war in Yemen, support for Bahrain's ongoing sectarian crackdown on Shi'a democracy activists, and the formation of a regional 'anti-terror' coalition of Muslim states ready to commit military forces.

All this is consistent with Saudi Arabia's traditional role, codified under the Nixon Doctrine derogating the regime as a regional policeman. As a 'pillar' of the Gulf, Saudi Arabia's role, among other regional US client-regimes, was to oversee regional security with extensive Western military support.

Billions of dollars of US and British arms sales to the Saudi kingdom have directly supported these adventures. The militarization of Saudi policy is, in other words, a direct function of its relationship with the West. To sustain 'stability' the kingdom's US and British backers are resorting to what they know best: empowering Saudi Arabia's domestic police-state and expanding its regional influence.

Last November the regime proposed measures for economic reform, including pervasive privatization of state enterprises and deep budget cuts, especially in relation to energy subsidies.

Saudi planners appear to have forgotten that subsidy reductions on essential food and fuel items played a major role in triggering the Arab Spring in countries like Egypt and Syria. Neoliberal reforms in those countries did little but widen inequalities and entrench corruption, as political repression to stave off crisis increased, often with Western complicity.

Judging by this recent history, the kingdom's days are numbered. The West's key pillar of regional 'stability' is beginning to crumble. ■

Nafeez Ahmed is an investigative journalist and international security scholar. He is a frequent contributor to *Middle East Eye*.

At this rate Saudi Arabia's net oil exports could decline to zero by 2030

1 FPRI nin.tl/US-Saudi-history **2** Mark Curtis nin.tl/Saudi-Bahrain **3** Middle East Eye nin.tl/Nafeez-Ahmed **4** The National Interest nin.tl/saudi-shapes-us-research **5** Science Direct nin.tl/crude-oil-forecast **6** Resilience nin.tl/future-net-oil-exports **7** BMO Research nin.tl/domestic-oil-demand **8** Bloomberg nin.tl/saudi-import-oil-2030 **9** Newsweek nin.tl/saudi-kill-cop21 **10** Middle East Eye nin.tl/KSA-collapse-inevitable **11** The Independent nin.tl/KSA-bankrupt-5yrs



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What the Saudi leaks tell us

An interview with Julian Assange.

Since June 2015 WikiLeaks has been releasing details of leaked cables and other documents that come from within the Saudi Foreign Office. They provide an insight into the internal workings of the secretive regime, its fears, and its strategies for spreading its influence abroad. More than 230,000 leaked Saudi documents have been published by WikiLeaks; a batch of 60,000 more cables and 50,000 pager messages was released last November.

Here are some things the leaks show us, according to Assange:

1 A paranoid ruling elite

‘What comes across from the cables is a small cloistered, intellectually isolated ruling elite with a paranoid worldview.

‘The cables make it clear that this is a small ruling elite with weak institutions such that a power structure can be taken over by other elements in that elite very quickly and instruments of state can be subordinated according to the will of the leadership.

‘The Saudi cables are internal conversation of a Saudi ministry at very high levels and mid-levels from which you can distil observations of the internal culture. The observation that I distil is that to keep the coherence of the internal culture you need an external threat, and the one that is most natural for Saudi Arabia to pick is Iran. Yes, there are genuine reasons for rivalry in the region, but they are inflated in the internal culture in order to keep it coherent and unified.’

2 Moves to destabilize Syria prior to uprising*

‘There is one high-level Saudi cable offering Saudi strategy in relation to Syria. The concluding paragraph says that the Assad regime will never forgive Saudi Arabia for what it has done to Syria. Because the Assad regime is “brutal and belligerent” it will always be after revenge. As a result it is a threat to the national security of Saudi Arabia.

‘One cable from the Saudi foreign ministry speaks about a confidential agreement [in 2012] between Saudi, Qatar and Turkey in relation to intervention [to topple the Syrian government].

‘In a US cable we published from 10 years ago William Roebuck, the US ambassador to Syria, outlines a smörgåsbord of proposals for destroying the Assad government. It included

trying to make it paranoid so that it overreacts and believes that its military forces are engaged in a coup against it; trying to make Sunni Syrians paranoid about Iran and Iranian-backed Shi’a wanting to convert Sunnis; and that it [the US] was going to try and work with Saudi and Egypt to increase these sectarian divisions.’

3 Using religion

‘One cable talks about the necessity of having the Saudi supreme religious leader say something to back up the government position. It’s not written as “I wonder if he would do it” but rather: “Tell him to do it”. What comes through the cables is that religion is a tool of the state. It’s clear that Saudi Arabia sees Wahhabi Islam and Sunnis as fertile ground for state interest.

‘The Saudi cables show that Wahhabism is a tool of Saudi Arabia as a regional hegemon that it tries to deploy not only in its own region but worldwide. It sees Sunnis as a potential source of converts to Wahhabism, or something close to Wahhabism. It sees Shi’a communities as places where it has no traction, but Iran has.’

4 Terrified of Iran and Shi’a influence

‘The Saudi regime is exquisitely paranoid in relation to Shi’a influence. There are indications that they are terrified of Iran but there’s no evidence of something they should be terrified of.

‘The battle with Iran they perceive to be a fight against Shi’a Islam. The Shi’a population is quite small globally. But Saudi Arabia is trying to check the growth of Shi’a Islam and reduce its influence.’

5 How to bribe foreign media

‘The cables show that Saudi embassies bribe Sunni or Arab media in foreign countries to take control of the discourse in relation to Saudi Arabia and its interests. They do this through direct investment: for example, by buying up a million dollar shares in a Lebanese TV station or establishing relations with journalists; buying up thousands of subscriptions to Arabic language magazines in order to tilt their coverage. It’s a clever trick because they don’t need any existing relationship or any intermediary. The Saudi foreign ministry just buys thousands of subscriptions, up to half the total in some cases. If they like what they write, they buy more; if not, they nose it down a bit to give the right signal.’

6 The Saudi-Israeli nexus and the West

‘There has been a Saudi-Israeli nexus in the Middle East for at least 10 years. It comes through [in] the US cables we published and to a lesser extent in the Saudi cables. Saudi considers Syria a mechanism of Iranian influence; Israel is occupying the Golan Heights which is part of Syria.

‘But the US relationship to the Israeli-Saudi nexus is changing. The smart US strategists, including the head of the CIA, are of the view that Saudi and Israel are getting in the way of broader US strategic interests.

‘We published some of CIA director John Brennan’s emails from back in 2008-09, when he was security advisor for Obama. Brennan says that the US should engage with Iran. The US being so adversarial with Iran has reduced its influence in the region; the Israeli-Saudi nexus is cramping its operations.

‘The US has not been as mindful of Saudi wishes as before. That has increased Saudi paranoia; it does not feel it has the unqualified backing of the US in the way it had. Europe takes its cues from US policy.

‘I would not take [this shift away from Saudi] too far: the US and British arms industries are major recipients of Saudi money as are banks, and the British property market.’

7 Dodgy deals for UN votes

‘There is some interesting traffic in relation to deals done for UN votes that reveals that the UK did a vote-swap with Saudi to get Saudi onto the Human Rights Council.

The offer to the UK from Saudi included \$100,000 to the section of the FCO [Foreign & Commonwealth Office] that deals with who should be elected to the human rights council. It’s

there in the cables, for “the campaigning expense that the FCO will need” to make sure that Saudi is elected to the HR council. Saudi ended up with the support of over 100 countries, so between bribes and vote-swapping that’s what it gets. There are a number of cables on how Saudi manages the UN and payments going to officials, dressed up as “assistance to your programme”.’

Julian Assange has been detained in Britain for five years, unable to leave his place of refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy without risk of being arrested and extradited to the US, which wants to try him for espionage. He is also unable to receive the hospital treatment he needs. ‘It’s tough,’ he comments.

‘But a super-max [prison] in the US would also be tough and I would not be able to work there.’ He adds: ‘Saudi has started a high-level criminal investigation into the cable release; it plans to put anyone distributing them in prison for 20 years. So we joke that we are much better off accepting extradition to Saudi Arabia because it’s only 20 years, whereas the US is gunning

for over half a century...’

In 2014 Assange and his lawyer filed a case in the UN for unlawful and arbitrary detention, under international law and the covenants Britain has signed up to. In February this year the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled in his favour. ■



*https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06DAMASCUS5399_a.html

Gambling with ISIS and Co

Saudi Arabia – birthplace of violent Islamic puritanism – is playing a dangerous game, writes ALASTAIR CROOKE.

We – my colleagues and I – had heard the rumours for weeks: some 50 individuals were being moved around the country. It seemed, even then, ominous. Saudi Arabia appeared to be preparing a mass execution.

One prominent name, Sheikh Nimr, was invariably mentioned. Yet his execution, we foresaw, would clearly ignite a firestorm – for he was a revered and senior Shi'a scholar, the leader of the Shi'a of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia and beyond; a man known for his commitment to nonviolence, and an upholder of the rights of Shi'a minorities throughout the Gulf. The US and Iran had both warned the Saudis in advance of the likely consequences of his beheading.

Then, in the New Year, it happened. Forty-seven were executed, including Nimr and three other Shi'a political protesters, as well as 43 Sunni 'al-Qaeda' Saudi citizens. The Saudi regime plainly knew the likely consequences, but its leaders went ahead regardless. It was a political act of clear deliberation: for the Shi'a of the Eastern Province are no threat to the kingdom. Most, including Nimr himself, belong to the 'quietest' tradition of Shi'ism, associated with Iraq, rather than Iran. They are, as it were, docile – and thoroughly contained by the Saudi security apparatus.

What, then, was King Salman, who suffers from dementia – and more particularly, his son Mohammad bin Salman, who effectively acts as regent – about?

That the act would be provocative to Iran, and to the Shi'a everywhere, was intentional, it is clear; and in that objective, they obviously succeeded. But why? And why now, at this particular moment? And why were so many Saudi 'al-Qaeda' included in the package?

A reckless gambler

The mass execution represented a tangled web of motivations, no doubt; but what it also signals is a desperation: a sense of reckless abandon that can seize even the most rational psyche, when its carefully constructed 'world' seems somehow to be falling apart, and every effort to pull it back together simply accelerates the self-destruction.

When an individual acts this way, it is distressing and saddening; but when a state does so, it can be hugely dangerous. Perhaps it is this prospect which induced the (normally very conservative) German Intelligence Service, the BND, at the end of last year to publish a memo saying that Saudi Arabia had adopted 'an impulsive policy of intervention' and portraying the king's son as a political gambler who is destabilizing the Arab world through proxy wars in Yemen and Syria. Intelligence services do not usually issue such politically explosive 'hand outs' to the press, unless they are truly alarmed.

To note that the Saudi leadership is besieged on all sides by severe difficulties is but one part of the story. The collapse in the price of crude oil has precipitated a real financial crisis for the country. The kingdom is eating through its foreign reserves at a clapping rate, the stock exchange is withering, and the Saudi Rial is at some risk of having to be devalued – that is to say, forced off its dollar peg.

More seriously, the kingdom is overstretched politically. The centre of gravity of the war in Yemen has been swung by Ansar Allah (the Houthis), and their allies, from Yemen itself to the three southern provinces of Saudi Arabia which were formerly a part of Yemen, and which the Yemenis now say they intend to liberate. Every day, Saudi cities in

There were protests around the world at the execution of Shi'a preacher Nimr al-Nimr early this year.



Toby Melville / Reuters

the south are being rocketed, military bases attacked, and Saudi forces (and their various mercenary forces) killed.

This military fiasco is coming to pose an existential threat to the Al Saud family leadership. There is little doubt that Mohammad bin Salman would like to divert domestic Saudi attention away from this messy war, of which he was the prime author.

But there are the other conflicts in which Saudi Arabia is involved in one way or another – all of which cost a king's ransom in support for Saudi proxies: Syria, Libya, Iraq, Egypt and Lebanon. And apart from the costs, none, from the Saudi perspective, are faring well. All in all, it presents a serious failure of Saudi foreign policy.

And perhaps this is what the BND had in mind when it portrayed bin Salman as a gambler. It seems that he thinks to act audaciously in order to metamorphose this adverse dynamic into a positive one: to invert his fortunes by provoking Iran, the old 'devil' into a reaction that will coalesce his Wahhabi compatriots around him, and raise Sunni states to his side, in a 'war' against 'meddlesome' Iran.

Well, it won't run, this game. Iran understands what is afoot, and intends to stand aloof, as the old Napoleonic adage has it: 'Never interfere with your enemy when he is in the process of making a mistake.'

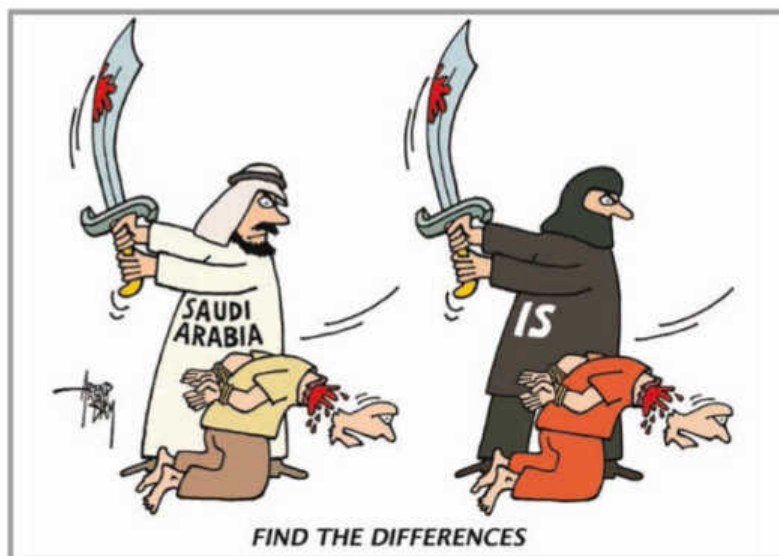
More Wahhabi than thou

The real danger is that bin Salman is cornering himself into the emotion-laden imagery of a Wahhabist jihad against the Shi'a apostates or idolaters of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. It may not result in a region-wide Sunni-Shi'a conflict (with luck), but it raises a different type of threat. It is in relation to this latter aspect that the other 43 executions of Saudis are relevant.

The ideology of ISIS is precisely that of the 'monotheism' authored by Mohammad Abd al-Wahhab, who together with Muhammad ibn Saud, founded the Saudi kingdom in the 18th century. This period was, like today, a time of crisis in the Sunni world, and Abd al-Wahhab was appalled by the decadence, frippery, finery and idolatry which he discerned as comprising this Ottoman world – and to which he attributed all Islam's trials and tribulations.

He saw the world about him as an insult to God. He believed that Islam had to be rescued, and that it could only be 'saved' by fire – by burning it clean. He and Ibn Saud did exactly that, leaving thousands slaughtered, Islamic shrines raised to the ground, and women and children enslaved – all the way to Mecca and Medina.

In brief, the principles to which ISIS adheres are precisely those on which the Saudi state



was founded. In fact, ISIS is closer to those early founding principles than is the Al Saud of today. ISIS, rather, accuses the contemporary Al Saud of slipping from those very principles, by its adoption of 'Western' statehood, modernity and materialism.

Thus, bin Salman, in trading on the radical puritan and iconoclastic ethos of the early Al Saud jihadis against the 'apostate' Shi'a, is taking a risk. Yes, it is a powerful weapon by which to contain Iran and rally domestic support; but it is a two-edged sword: the 'gene' of radical Wahhabism – latent within contemporary Saudi society – can as easily be directed against today's Al Saud 'modernizers'. The executions of the 'al-Qaeda' prisoners therefore were a warning that radical Wahhabist sentiments can and should be directed externally, but will *not* be tolerated internally.

Above all perhaps is the Saudi fear that the pendulum of US foreign policy, which moved to the Sunni side after the Iranian revolution, is swinging back – finally repelled by the murderous acts of the Wahhabi-orientated jihadists in Syria and Iraq; and by European and US complicity in the long history of using inflamed Sunni jihadism as a tool to achieve their objectives. The cost is clear: the chaos across the region, and the threat of millions of refugees poised to enter Europe. Bin Salman wants to show us that he has the capacity to wreak havoc, and that Saudi Arabia cannot lightly be cast aside. ■

Alastair Crooke is the director of Conflicts Forum. He has 20 years' experience working with Islamist groups in the Middle East and Asia and has facilitated various ceasefires in the Occupied Territories. His book, *Resistance: The Essence of the Islamist Revolution*, is reviewed in **NI 435** nir.tl/Crooke-book

The principles to which ISIS adheres are precisely those on which the Saudi state was founded. In fact, ISIS is closer to those early founding principles than is the Al Saud of today

Cameroon

With the terrifying exception of overloaded trucks speeding vast tree trunks from forest to port, things tend to move slowly in Cameroon. In fact, in many ways it feels like a country in a deep sleep, cobwebbed with bureaucratic inertia, corruption and nepotism. In Paul Biya, it has had the same President since 1982, and is dominated by an interwoven elite – political, commercial, religious and traditional – drawn from a single post-independence generation, locked into atrophied patterns of informal power-sharing and patronage that have shaped the country since the 1960s.

This elite is increasingly elderly. President Biya will be 85 when his current term of office ends in 2018. His longest-standing political opponent, John Fru-Ndi of the Social Democratic Front, is 74. In the event that Biya dies in office, the interim President will be the leader of the Senate – who is himself 82. From ministers to traditional chiefs, Cameroon's rulers are approaching dotage. With age has come conservatism, caution to the point of paranoia, and insularity. Biya has remained resolutely distant from regional politics and didn't even attend the event to celebrate his 30th year in office. Social and economic stagnation have followed.

But one virtue – perhaps the

only virtue – of an entrenched gerontocracy is stability. Cameroon remains relatively unscarred by the upheavals that have convulsed the rest of its region. Apart from a coup attempt in 1984 and, in recent years, the encroachment of Boko Haram into Cameroon's remote north, it has remained free from large-scale violence. There were riots in 2008, over constitutional change to lift presidential term limits, and there have been sporadic protests and strikes since, but nothing to threaten the status quo.

Yet Cameroonians are acutely aware that it could, and perhaps should, be a deeply conflicted country. It is home to profound social faultlines: between the anglophone peripheries and the French-speaking majority; between the Muslim north and Christian south; and between a bewilderingly complicated array of some 250 ethnic groups. That the post-independence consensus, for all its failings and frustrations, has held so long is in part testament to the commonly held fear that the alternative could be far worse.

However, this status quo is under increasing strain. On top of long-standing divides of language, ethnicity and religion, newer faultlines are opening – most importantly between rich and poor, young and old. Like much of the rest of Africa,

Cameroon faces the dual challenge of an enormous youth population and sky-high unemployment. Social discontent is to some extent mollified by government fuel subsidies – a constant drain on public finances – and is hard to judge in a context of state harassment of journalists, activists and opponents. But it is real, and growing. Add in fears of religious extremism, notably in the Muslim communities exposed to Boko Haram brutality, rumours of division in the armed forces, and a deeply unstable regional neighbourhood, and the mix becomes more volatile still.

For now, these grievances have no real avenue for expression. Politics is comprehensively dominated by Biya's Cameroon People's Democratic Movement, which won 82 per cent of seats in the last National Assembly elections. While Biya remains in office, they are likely to remain latent. But when he goes, as, sooner or later he must, the tensions that his long rule has kept in suspension may bubble to the surface. It is an open question whether the remaining guardians of the status quo will be able to manage them. Cameroon's long sleep continues, but the alarm clock is ticking. It is difficult to say what mood the country will be in when it finally wakes up.

Ben Shepherd

At a glance



Leader: President Paul Biya (since 1982).

Economy: GNI per capita \$1,350 (Gabon \$9,720, France \$42,960).

Monetary unit: CFA (Coopération Financière en Afrique Centrale) franc.

Main exports: Crude oil and products derived from it, timber, cocoa beans, coffee, cotton, aluminium. The current low oil price will hit Cameroon hard – almost 40% of its export earnings normally derive from this. But it is also agriculturally well endowed. Its economic performance satisfies neither the IMF and international business nor the poor, being hamstrung by corruption, inequality and political stagnation. The government priority has been subsidizing food and fuel/power rather than education and healthcare.

Population: 22.7 million. Annual growth rate 2.5%. People per square kilometre 48 (France 121).

Health: Infant mortality 57 per 1,000 live births (Gabon 36, France 4). Lifetime risk of maternal

death 1 in 34 (France 1 in 4,300).

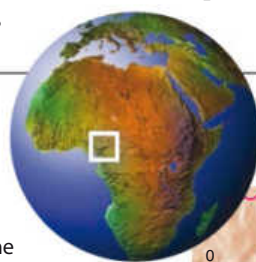
HIV prevalence rate 4.8%.

Environment: Deforestation is the main problem, not just unsustainable logging by foreign companies but also clearance for fuelwood and subsistence farming – Cameroon lost 13% of its forest cover between 1990 and 2005 and rates of deforestation are increasing. In the north this has contributed to soil erosion and desertification.

Language: There are at least 24 African languages but French and English are official, the latter a legacy of British rule of the southwest between 1918 and 1961, at which point northern Cameroons opted in a plebiscite to join Nigeria while the southern half voted to become part of independent Cameroon.

Religion: Broadly 40% indigenous beliefs, 40% Christian, 20% Muslim.

Human Development Index: 0.512, 153rd of 188 (Gabon 0.684, France 0.888).





Clockwise from top left: **Women parade in the village of Kembong, near Mamfe in the southwest region of Cameroon; a young man selling fuel in bottles outside his house in Mamfe; curious children at the village primary school in Kembong; and transporting forest timber.** Photos by George Osodi / Panos Pictures.

Star ratings Last profiled September 2000



INCOME DISTRIBUTION ★★★

Inequality is not as severe as in many other African states, with a lower GINI coefficient than the US, in part because of subsidies on food and fuel. But poverty remains widespread, with about 40% of the population living on less than \$2 a day.

2000 ★★



LIFE EXPECTANCY ★

55 years (Gabon 64, France 82); barely improved over its 1990 figure of 53.6 and lower than the regional average.

2000 ★★★



POSITION OF WOMEN ★★

2013 elections saw a doubling of female MPs, to 31%, but women face systematic discrimination, widespread harassment and sexual violence – including a recent campaign against ‘indecent dressing’ – and a disproportionately high maternal mortality rate.

2000 ★★★



LITERACY ★★★

Over three-quarters of the population are reported to be literate, but only half of Cameroon's children get a secondary education.

2000 ★★★



FREEDOM ★★

Independent media exist – both press and broadcast – and some criticism of the government is tolerated, though journalists face harassment by security forces and sanction by the state regulator. Civil-society meetings and demonstrations are denied permission or forcibly disrupted.

2000 ★



SEXUAL MINORITIES ★

Homosexuality has been illegal since 1971 and is punishable by five years' imprisonment. Though there has been a drop in arrests in recent years, there is widespread harassment, discrimination and violence against individuals, activists and defenders of LGBT rights.

NI assessment

POLITICS ★★★

President Biya's 33-year rule has traded stability for stagnation, successfully managing Cameroon's internal contradictions and a dangerous neighbourhood, but at the cost of inertia, corruption and an addiction to government subsidy. Though nothing is likely to change in the short term, Biya's inevitable departure will be a huge challenge for a political system that seized up decades ago. Change could bring much-needed opportunity for Cameroon's discontents – young, angry, urban and unemployed – but may also expose long-buried social faultlines.

★★★★★ EXCELLENT
★★★★ GOOD
★★★ FAIR
★★ POOR
★ APPALLING

Crocodile smiles and con tricks

Unscrupulous fraudsters persuade vulnerable families to hand over their children – who then disappear into a flourishing ‘orphanage industry’. FIONA BROOM reports on efforts to stop the child-trafficking trade.

In Nepal’s remote mountain villages, an insidious force has for two decades been destroying young lives and tearing families apart. The devastation visited on these villages is no natural disaster, but one of human making. It usually comes in the guise of a well-dressed man carrying a briefcase and the promise of education and a new life for the children. But these children’s new realities are far from the dreams their parents held for them: behind the traffickers’ crocodile smiles lies a life of sexual slavery, forced labour, or destitution as a commodity in the huge orphanage industry.

Chhetra was nine or ten when he was taken from his village to a children’s institution in the capital, Kathmandu: ‘I was taken from my village to get a better education. When I reached the house where I would stay, I saw many children there. At first I thought it was not bad, but after one month, it was getting worse and worse. There was not enough food or clothing for the children. After a while, the food finished and we had to go to the street to beg.’

Supply chain

Child trafficking has been a scourge in Nepal since armed conflict between Maoist insurgents and the state began in 1996. To save their boys from conscription by Maoist rebels, families paid to have them taken to what they were told were safe homes in Kathmandu. Instead, children were presented as orphans, often being forced to live in squalour to arouse sympathy and donations from tourists.

But the lucrative orphan industry didn’t stop when the war, which cost about 16,000 lives, ended in 2006. International organizations heard that the groups of children dumped by traffickers outside Kathmandu checkpoints were orphans, and sent in volunteers to place them in homes. With foreign donations flooding in, the traffickers simply adapted their business model at the supply end of the chain.

‘Ninety per cent of the time it’s rural

children being taken to urban areas,’ Jack Hogan, former communications director at non-government organization Umbrella Foundation, says. ‘They’re taken from isolated communities. Traffickers go where there are no schools or health posts, where there are no opportunities for kids. They approach the parents and say they’ll take their children to school in Kathmandu for a small fee, and promise they’ll be educated and earn money.’

Traffickers know exactly how to exploit the desperate poverty that leads parents to accept the false lifelines they’re offered. The promise that their child could become a doctor is enough to convince many that sending their child away is the best course of action.

When parents lose contact with their children, few can afford to travel to Nepal’s five major tourist districts, which house 82 per cent of institutions, to track them down. ‘These are not areas of need, they are [tourist] districts,’ says Martin Punaks, country director of child protection NGO Next Generation Nepal (NGN). ‘Is that a coincidence? We think not. That’s how the orphanage business works in Nepal – and it is a business.’

Krish was seven when he was trafficked to Kathmandu and its fraudulent Little Princes Children’s Home, but was one of the lucky ones to be found by his mother. Krish, now a recipient of an NGN scholarship, has helped reintegrate other trafficked children. ‘Poverty has become one of the major causes for many of the immoral and illegal acts prevalent in our society,’ he said. ‘Poverty creates such critical circumstances that one tolerates being far away from a loved one.’

Fuelling the industry

There are now 700 registered and an unknown number of unregistered institutions housing more than 15,000 children in Nepal. About 85 per cent are believed to have at least one living parent.

‘The vast majority of children in homes don’t need to be there. That’s a fact,’ says Punaks.

Traffickers know exactly how to exploit the desperate poverty that leads parents to accept the false lifelines they’re offered

Traffickers are equally adept at exploiting foreigners' sympathies for substantial profits. The people working in Nepal's child protection agencies are often motivated by their past complicity in the orphanage industry.

Conor Grennan and Farid Ait-Mansour established NGN after volunteering at Little Princes Children's Home in 2005, where children were forced to pretend to be orphans. 'When I hear stories of well-intentioned volunteers in Nepal unwittingly causing more trafficking by paying to volunteer in corrupt orphanages, it breaks my heart,' Grennan said.

Umbrella founders Viva Bell and Dave Cutler discovered the manager of a home they were fundraising for was pocketing donations while the children were neglected and abused. Umbrella has since participated in seven orphanage raids with Nepal's Central Child Welfare Board and rescued 391 children.

No child is too young in the traffickers' eyes. Last year, NGN rescued a 17-month-old infant in one raid, and a two-year-old from another institution, which Punaks described as one of the worst cases the organization had seen.

NGN describes the devastating results of the good intentions of volunteers and donors as a paradox: 'They volunteer their time and money to support needy children and develop a poor country, yet, in doing so, they are inadvertently keeping children away from their families, tearing apart rural communities, and fuelling a criminal and corrupt industry that ultimately prevents Nepal from developing.'

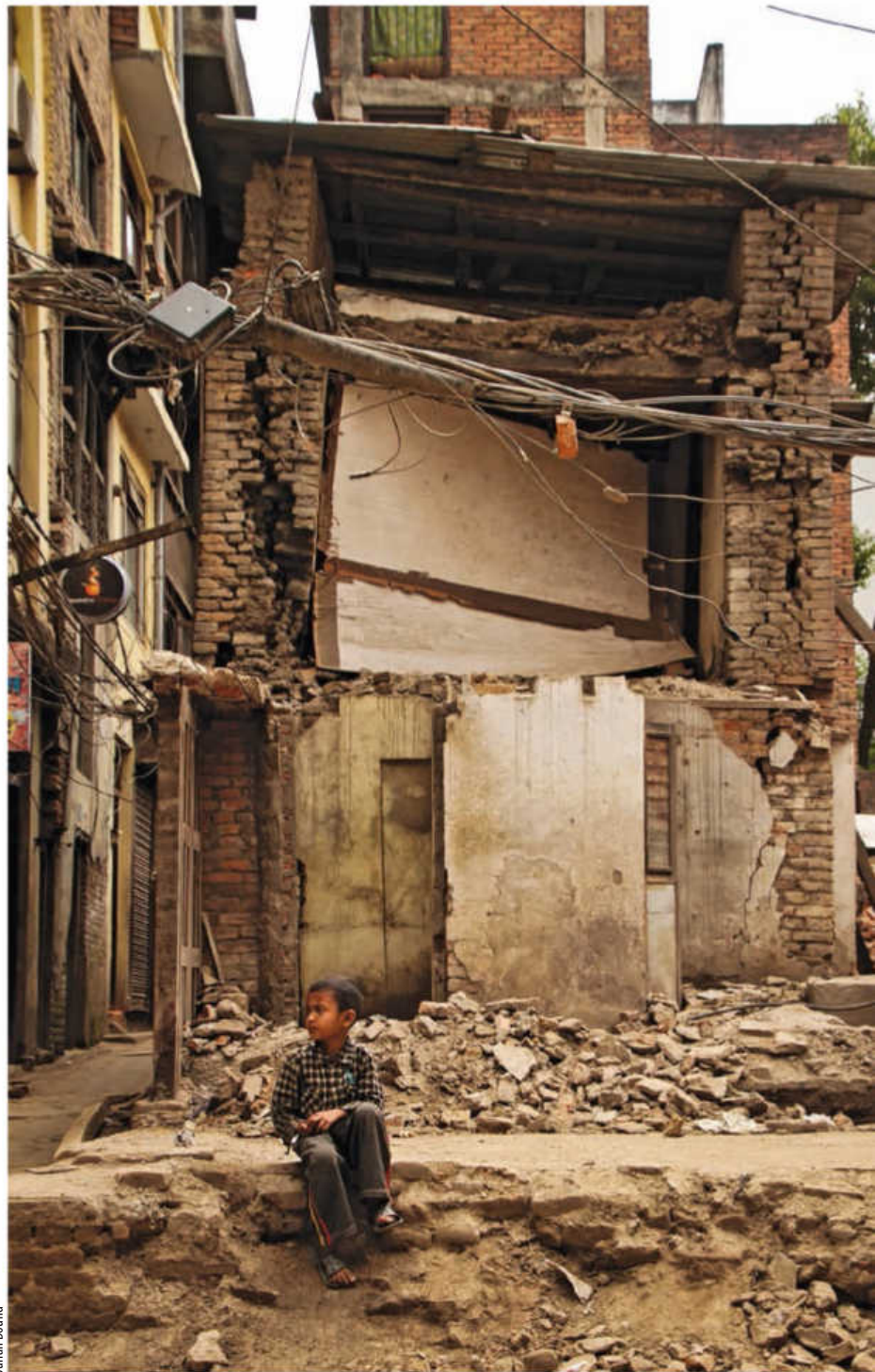
Late last year, for the first time a series of information evenings for foreign tourists was held in a Kathmandu bar. Punaks told the predominantly Western crowd that lingering colonial ideas of Western superiority led to an inflated sense of ability in voluntourists. 'Nepal is incredibly complex,' Punaks said. 'There are incredibly intelligent Nepalis here who can't solve the problems.' He admitted that he too had been a naïve young foreigner who thought he could save the world.

Punaks and colleague Katie Feit were equally forthright in their comprehensive 2014 report 'The Paradox of Orphanage Voluntourism', which calls for foreigners to abandon the practice.

'Orphanage voluntourism creates long-term attachment problems and psychological disorders for children, denies them their right to grow up in a family-based care setting, leaves them at risk of physical and sexual abuse, and fuels a corrupt profit-making trafficking industry,' Punaks and Feit wrote. 'It is not an ethical option in the vast majority of cases.'

Reintegration

Anti-trafficking organizations feared the chaos caused by last year's earthquakes would leave displaced children vulnerable to traffickers,



Julian Bound

who could play on foreigners' expectations that scores of orphans would be left in the wake of the disaster.

Inter-country adoption was suspended and travel agencies were asked to cease touting orphanage tourism. The government forbade children from crossing between districts without a guardian. The worst-hit districts were those already targeted by traffickers, due to their extreme isolation and poverty.

Umbrella established child-friendly spaces in those areas and registered children by name

The chaos following last year's earthquakes left children in Nepal more vulnerable to traffickers.

and photograph. A helpline run by the Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre (CWIN), received dozens of calls from earthquake-affected districts. Mobilizing its network of more than 350 staff, CWIN prevented 250 children from being trafficked.

CWIN's protection programme manager Bharat Adhikari says that up to 40 rescued children are in the group's care at any one time. They are temporarily housed in transit homes while CWIN staff trace their families.

Reintegrating trafficking victims into their communities is a core aim of many of the groups. Cultural barriers can pose problems – if a parent remarries, children are sometimes rejected – particularly for girls who have been forced into, or are suspected of, sexual acts.

'With girls, it's difficult, because in our society sometimes they're not accepted back because of the issue of sexuality,' Adhikari said. 'If society does not accept the situation, we have to put them in an institution and provide education.'

Reintegration officers face the seemingly insurmountable task of finding families, armed with as little as a current photo of a child, who may be traumatized or taken too young to remember where they're from. Officers walk for days to access remote villages located far from any roads. They gather information anywhere they can, often canvassing hundreds of villagers. And their success rate is staggering – just three of the 391 children Umbrella rescued are still unsure of where they came from.

Officers also carry out their task with the knowledge they're targeting the businesses of dangerous people. Staff have received threats from traffickers to cease their work.

Punaks notes that Nepal's legal system isn't capable of dealing with the scale of the problem, while CWIN's Bharat Adhikari argues that laws, regulations and policies need to be strengthened, though he admits it's difficult to enforce laws.

Robust legislation, political will to support prosecutions, and awareness about trafficking at home and abroad will be necessary to curb child trafficking in the future. But equally important is the passion of some of Nepal's youngest citizens to secure the best possible future for their communities.

Urgent Notice for Foreigner

Needed volunteer in orphanage home

_____ is a orphanage home, just 25 min far from Thamel. We have 10 children's (7 boys and 3 girls) who are totally orphans and poor. Till the date of establishment the organization is run by just 1 person without any governmental support, and non from the factories or any organization, so it been a long time that only one person is running this organization, which is making so much difficult to provide the children's the basic things as well from the one person only. Being there is no any hand support, our orphanage need immediate volunteering help from the foreigners.

In this immediate urgency of ours, if you will like to volunteer in orphanage home or just want to visit our orphanage, then please contact us on:-

Government. Regd. no.:- _____

Email:- _____@gmail.com

Phone:- +977 _____

website:- www._____.com

'When I hear stories of well-intentioned volunteers unwittingly causing more trafficking by paying to volunteer in corrupt orphanages, it breaks my heart'

Foreigners' sympathy is being exploited in posters to recruit volunteers to work in Nepal's orphanages.

Following last year's earthquakes, trafficking victims reintegrated by Umbrella turned out in devastated regions to labour through the heat and destruction to protect displaced children. 'The Umbrella kids I met were all smiles and happy to be helping,' Hogan said.

In one of the districts hardest hit by the earthquakes, young people are volunteering to board outbound buses to check for unaccompanied children or those travelling with a non-relative, acting as the 'gatekeepers' to protect vulnerable children.

When Punaks took the reins as NGN country director, he penned a missive in which he said he feared combating child trafficking was an 'impossible task'. But he realized he had, all around him, a commodity that could be the desperately needed change: young, idealistic Nepalis. 'They risk their lives in the mountains searching for families, and they work late into the night to prepare important reports,' Punaks wrote in 2012. 'It is then that it hits me that *they* are the answer I have been looking for. Our plan for NGN needs to empower more Nepalis like them... to empower families, ordinary citizens, NGOs and the government to be the change that stops child trafficking.' ■

Fiona Broom is a freelance journalist based in Nepal.

Kholoud Waleed

Founding an independent newspaper to expose the crimes of the Syrian regime cost this former teacher her identity and turned her life upside down. But the battle for freedom of speech continues, she tells DARIO SABAGHI.

In 2011, a Syrian woman with hazel eyes framed by her hijab left the primary-school classroom where she taught, took out a notebook and pen and decided to tell the truth about the Syrian revolution. Months later, she founded a weekly independent newspaper to report on the crimes committed by President Bashar al-Assad. Wanted by the regime, she fled the country and changed her name. Everybody now calls her Kholoud Waleed.

‘My life changed completely,’ she explains. ‘When the revolution started, I quit my job and participated in peaceful demonstrations against the regime. My life changed because I wanted to change my country.’

Along with her friends, Waleed founded *Enab Baladi* (The Grapes of my Country). ‘We started to think about creating this newspaper in late 2011,’ she explains. ‘We were a group of young Syrian activists organizing demonstrations calling for democracy, free elections and human rights. But at that time the regime’s media didn’t say a word about what was really happening in Syria.’

The first edition of *Enab Baladi* was published in January 2012. Since then, its popularity has grown week by week and it is now one of Syria’s most prominent independent newspapers. It is currently printed in Turkey, where around 7,000 copies are cranked out every week; 2,000 are smuggled into Syria.

On 7 October 2015 Kholoud Waleed was honoured with the 2015 Anna Politkovskaya Award by Reach All Women in WAR, an NGO which supports women human rights defenders working in war-torn countries. The organization remarked that Waleed ‘bravely reports to the world and to the people in Syria about the atrocities of the conflict, despite the dangers she and her colleagues face every day’.

‘When we printed the first edition in January 2012,’ says Waleed, ‘the situation in Syria was getting worse. We thought: Syrians don’t know what is going on around the country! Even we didn’t know whether demonstrations were taking place elsewhere in the country because not everyone had access to the internet, which had been blocked by the regime. So we decided

to convey the truth, to show what the regime was doing.’

Waleed thinks that winning the award will help her promote her cause: ‘Now, people know there are some Syrian journalists who convey stories about Syria, despite the dangers. If they don’t know it yet, they will know it soon; if they know it, this will remind them that it has been four years since the revolution started.’

Enab Baladi has around 20 to 25 reporters; 14 of them are in Syria, reporting from cities such as Aleppo, Damascus, Daraa, Latakia and Homs, as well as from Raqqa, the capital of the so-called Islamic State. All of them publish under a pseudonym, living their lives undercover.

‘We mainly publish local news. We focus our articles on humanitarian issues that happen in Syria and in the countries which are hosting Syrian refugees. Our stories are about people who have survived the war, how they lived during the shelling, how they moved from one place to another, and how they dealt with the situation,’ says Waleed. ‘*Enab Baladi* is dependent on donations; several NGOs provide us with small grants to help us survive.’

Waleed and the *Enab Baladi* reporters are pursuing a battle for freedom of speech, one of the most important issues of the revolution. ‘Our mission is to tell the people what is going on in Syria,’ she explains. ‘Otherwise I would consider myself a traitor.’

Since the start of the revolution, she has lost many friends and relatives. ‘Sometimes, we lose hope and we cry; we feel helpless and hopeless. But then you feel you have to continue, you have to tell the people that we are being killed by the regime. It is our job to go on.’ ■

Dario Sabaghi is a freelance journalist interested in human rights and conflict.



Enab Baladi

Who gives a damn about democracy?

Our political institutions have lost credibility and popular support. ROBERTO SAVIO argues for a revival and re-engagement, before it is too late.

The last world survey on the strength of democracy went totally ignored, except by the *New York Times*, which published a special report. And yet the 2015 data collected by the World Values Survey, a respected research association with the United Nations, is extremely worrying.

In the US, the number of Americans who approve the idea of 'having the army rule' has increased from 1 in 15 in 1995 to 1 in 6 now. And while a strong 72 per cent of those born before World War Two assigned living in a democracy the highest value on a scale of 1 to 10, for those born after 1980, less than 30 per cent did.

The proportion of Europeans opting for democracy was scarcely greater, at 32 per cent among those born after 1980. And it was even smaller in eastern Europe, at 24 per cent. Their main concerns were income level, job security and a possible pension – all of which rated higher than the type of regime under which to live.

To this, there is of course a generational explanation. Democracy was a victory, a treasure on which to build, for those who lived through the horrors of the Second World War. Younger generations have only an intellectual idea of what it means to live under a dictatorship, not a lived experience. As founding father of the European Union Altiero Spinelli said, now everybody sleeps without fear of being woken at night.

Cumbersome, inefficient?

But in fact the debate is much more complex. It is taken as a self-evident truth that once a country becomes democratic, an alternative system of government is no longer possible, because citizens look to democracy as the only legitimate form of governance. And democracy is perceived as synonymous with economic and social growth.

Once China has a consistent middle class, went the theory, it will necessarily move to a multiparty system. But there is now a growing school of thought about the shortcomings and inefficiency of democracy.

From time to time, someone used to commend the advantages of the 'Chilean model' (based on Augusto Pinochet's 1973-90 military dictatorship); now they do the same about the 'Chinese model', considered much more efficient and productive than the cumbersome process that democracy requires.

In Europe itself, we have a Prime Minister of an ex-communist country, Viktor Orban of Hungary, who makes public statements proclaiming the obsolescence of parliamentary democracy. And Orban was elected in free elections.

Russia, of course, is a more strident case. President Vladimir Putin, who is the paramount model of autocracy, enjoys popular support close to 80 per cent. And it is under-reported that rightwing European leaders, from France's Marine Le Pen to Italy's Matteo Salvini, look to Putin as a model – and make public statements to that effect.

It is high time to reflect on the causes for the decline in the credibility of political institutions. Is it just a generational problem, or is it also that the legitimacy of the political system is more and more in question?

When you look at the cost of the US presidential campaign, which will be close to \$4 billion, and you learn that a small pool of rich donors dominates election-giving (130 families and their businesses provided more than half of the money raised by Republican candidates in the first eight months of the campaign), it is difficult to see the vibrant democracy, the lighthouse of the world, that US rhetoric claims at every moment.

A 30-year survey, quoted in the *New York Times*, by political scientists Martin

Giles and Benjamin Page, found that while interest groups and economic elites were very influential, the views of ordinary citizens had virtually no impact. Their conclusion: 'In the US, the majority does not rule.'

Growing disconnect

In the World Values Survey, a third of Americans now tend toward the high end of the 10-point scale on the statement: 'The US is not at all democratic.' And the original contest between those scions of political dynasties, Hillary Clinton and Jeb Bush, in the presidential race has been overtaken by outsiders, including the completely unpredictable and unrestrained Donald Trump for the Republicans, and a socialist candidate (until now an anathema in the US), Bernie Sanders.

This unprecedented development shows the growing disconnect between citizens and traditional politics. The same surprises have come in Europe, with Jeremy Corbyn winning the Labour Party leadership in Britain, Alexis Tsipras's leftwing Syriza party governing in Greece, and anti-austerity Podemos heralding the death of two-party politics in Spain.

The two fault lines in the European Union – between northern and southern Europe over the model of economic governance (austerity versus development) and between western and eastern Europe over solidarity (refugees) – are obscuring the problem of legitimacy of the European institutions.

The fact that a few people in Brussels decide the destiny of millions of citizens, without any consultation (the referendum of its citizens cost Greece dearly) is creating a third divide, deeper and more serious than the other two.

The case of Greece was preceded by that of Cyprus – an example of lack of accountability and transparency. Embarrassed Eurocrats (among them head of the European Central Bank, Mario Draghi) had to acknowledge that they took a wrong decision in managing the Cypriot financial crisis, and made a U-turn, by twisting the arm of the government.

And the fact that the first two Greek bailouts were basically conceived to bail out the French and German banks, with very little going to the Greek economy, has increased the perceptions of citizens that banks are more important than people.

Political polarization

In 2015, the number of bankers who were paid more than €1 million was 3,178. Of these, 2,086 were in Britain. The majority received over €2 million; nine made over €10 million.

And if we look to dollar millionaires, globally they reached 920,000 in 2014.

What is new is that in recent years, very conservative institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been warning that the growth in social inequality constitutes a brake on economic growth, echoing a study by the OECD.

The most recent IMF study warns about the reduction of the middle class and the increasing numbers both of the very poor and the very rich. Interestingly, the World Values Survey found that 40 per cent of rich Americans approve having a 'strong leader who doesn't have to bother with Congress or elections'. In 1995, they numbered 20 per cent.

The decline of the middle class is accompanied by a polarization in politics, and the constant growth of extremist and xenophobic parties, which now gather votes from workers and the less fortunate, who once voted to the Left. This is completely changing the political landscape.

Who would have believed that Denmark, one of the few countries in the world that dedicated one per cent of its budget to development aid (the US figure is 0.2 per cent), would reject any refugee on its soil, under the pressure of its rightwing party? Or that Hungary would resort to actions that are reminiscent of Nazi times? Or that eastern European countries openly would declare that they are in the EU to get, but not to give anything?

The democratic system took its legitimacy from its ability to support values like justice and solidarity, and the general development of society. There are no historical precedents to tell us what will happen when citizens go into a social and economic decline over decades, and youth do not see a clear future.

But there are historical precedents to tell us that a society in crisis slips easily into populist and authoritarian regimes, especially if the rich elites support that road.

It should by now be clear to all that the system is broken, and clearly needs fixing. But will this declining democracy, with so few statespeople and so many politicians, be able to provide the fix? This a question that we need, unfortunately, to address. ■

Roberto Savio is the founder and president emeritus of the Inter Press Service (IPS) news agency and publisher of *Other News*. This article originally appeared in *Other News* and is reprinted with permission.

Democracy was a victory, a treasure on which to build, for those who lived through the horrors of the Second World War

FILM

The Pearl Button (82 minutes)

written and directed by **Patricio Guzmán**



Old photographs of Chile's original people form part of Patricio Guzmán's beautiful sad elegy.

Patricio Guzmán makes political films. You may have come across his three-part *The Battle of Chile*, made in the 1970s about the Allende socialist government and the bloody US-sponsored military coup that ended it. His later films are also 'poetic'. They don't have a straightforward narrative but link people, places, the natural world, even the cosmos, in unexpected and revealing ways.

The Pearl Button opens with shots of a water droplet imprisoned in a quartz crystal. Then we see water in its various states – solid, liquid, vapour – along the near 50,000-mile-long, deeply indented, island-crowded, labyrinthine shore of western Patagonia. In old monochrome photographs we see the region's original people, some of them in body paint depicting the stars and the cosmos, standing naked in snow.

In the 1880s, there were about 8,000 people scattered around the islands, living off the ocean. Until they were hunted (hunters were paid per hacked-

off testicle, breast and, for children, ear) or shifted onto reserves. One of them was sold for a pearl button, and toured to England. Today they have maybe 20 direct descendants – Chile is a civilized country with a history of massacres.

Guzmán's 2010 doc, *Nostalgia for the Light*, uncovered bodies of coup victims in the Atacama desert. This latest film finds evidence of people the Chilean air force dumped, dead and alive, into the ocean. It's contemplative, sometimes chilling, metaphorical – with a starring role for water – and visionary. Unpretentiously, it connects objects, people, places, political states, states of matter. This is a beautiful and deeply sad elegy, for Chile and the disappeared.

★★★★★ ML

The Survivalist (104 minutes)

written and directed by **Stephen Fingleton**

As the opening titles roll, a dynamic graphic of growing, then catastrophically plunging, oil production sets the context – post-industrial scarcity, with population and social collapse. A nervy-eyed young man lives alone, hiding in the woods, growing cabbages and potatoes. He's fit and muscular, a survivor, always carrying a shotgun, and has set up rusty jingling tin cans to warn him of any approach – intruders are buried in his vegetable plot.

But when a steady-eyed, long-white-haired woman appears with her teenage daughter, seeking food and offering, first of all vegetable seeds, then sex, he's thrown. They stay the night. They insist, looking over his gun barrels, on food first, then sex. They stay the next night. And then the next. The mother, who's looking for the opportunity to slit his throat, offers co-operation – that they all work together, extend the 'farm' to support them all. Does he trust them? He has a recurring dream of his brother's death – killed, he says, because he naively trusted someone.

Fingleton's debut is well set up, shot and acted, but not fully imagined. The vegetable plot is hardly big enough for a herb garden, and so many murderous crazies pass by there would be more bodies than beans to plant. Genre – westerns and horror films – displaces reality, and the last scene undermines it all.

★★★ ML



The Survivalist – post-industrial scarcity and social collapse in Fingleton's debut.

MUSIC



Sainkho – accessing sonic places most people can't reach.

Like a Bird or Spirit, not a Face

by **Sainkho Namtchlyak** (*Ponderosa 131 CD + download*)

Sainkho Namtchlyak is such an artist that she is always able to pull surprises out of her bag. The big one for **Like a Bird or Spirit, not a Face**, the Tuvan throat-singer's first album for several years, is its collaboration with the Tinariwen beat-masters, Eyadou Ag Leche and Said Ag Ayad.

Recorded in France in 48 hours, this beautiful 10-track album imparts a vision of space – both the Mongolian steppes of Namtchlyak's childhood and the Malian musicians' Saharan sweeps. A subdued instrumentation and, from producer Ian Brennan, a loose electronic wash, makes this a generously expansive album.

This breadth of vision is conjured, best of all, through

Namtchlyak's expanded vocals. There is a shamanic component to the way her voice can change registers and timbres so quickly, accessing sonic places most people can't go. These, along with some marked changes in pace between the songs, add to the drama; but the overall impression of **Like a Bird** is one of reminiscence. The sparse poetry of 'The Road Back' is hugely tender in its reach, while there is a toughness to the swinging rhythm of 'Nostalgia to'. 'I am doing fine,' Namtchlyak, sings, but 'I would like to taste Tuvan tea with milk.' All power to her.

★★★★ LG
ponderosa.it/en

De Monteverdi

by **De Monteverdi** (*No Method 114 CD + download*)

This eponymously titled debut from the Swedish singer-songwriter Ellinor Nilsson is a tantalizing prospect of things yet to come. Coming after the very low-key 2012 release of *Friends & Enemies*, described as a collection of 'audio sketches', **De Monteverdi** is being touted as an album that will whet the appetites of fans of PJ Harvey and Cat Power. While there is something of an overlap, not least in its central presence of a strong female singer in consummate control of a stripped-down music, the similarities end there. What makes **De Monteverdi** interesting on its own terms is how Nilsson navigates a path between musical content, texture and expression.

There are nine confident songs here, all bound within a simple guitar and keyboard provided by Nilsson's co-producers Kalle Johansson and Magnus Öberg. Some folk-inspired electronica on, for example, 'Summer Heart', contributes

a wafty mood where needed and to good effect. Nilsson's songs are reflective and there is a real immediacy in them, unhampered by unnecessary production or studio fiddling.

Thematically, there is no fear in expressing strong content and Nilsson's candour is refreshing. What instigated the stark 'Ode to Mental Instability', the closing song couched in a picked-out acoustic guitar melody and some far-off fluting? Nilsson affects a deliberate distraction at points, but she never lets the song collapse. This is significant – so often the female songwriter is considered to be the repository of feeling rather than strength. Nilsson is strong enough to include reference to frailty and numbness, but canny enough to state that she's 'not like the others'. Interesting.

★★★ LG
nomethod.se/demonteverdi/



De Monteverdi –
consummate control

Where the Dead Pause and the Japanese Say Goodbye

by **Marie Mutsuki Mockett** (WW Norton & Company, ISBN 978-0-393-35229-0)

The subtitle of this book states simply: A journey. But don't be fooled into thinking that this intriguing narrative is a mere travelogue. The journeys undertaken by Marie Mutsuki Mockett are far more complex: inwards, to a greater understanding of her own grief and depression following the death of her father; outwards, as she sees her own sorrow reflected in a whole nation rocked by the 2011 tsunami; back in time, as she gains insight into and consolation from Japan's rich spiritual and cultural past; and, tentatively, towards a future in which she can imagine moving past her sadness and finding joy again.

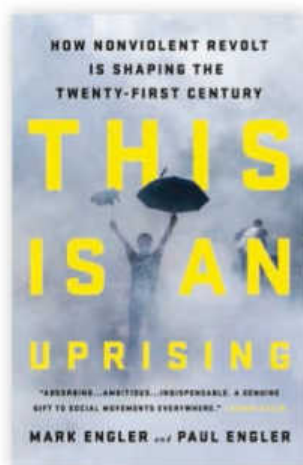
Brought up to speak Japanese by her mother, whose family owns a Buddhist temple just 40 kilometres from the Fukushima nuclear power plant, the author overcomes initial resistance on the part of the famously reticent Japanese, and

dives into their culture and religious traditions. She sweeps away some of the stereotypes as she learns how the country is dealing with its collective grief through stoicism, denial, spiritual belief, and even humour.

The First Noble Truth of Buddhism, the author is told, is that life is full of suffering. Yet her travels through a country that five years ago was hit by such tragedy brings her great solace: life and death, she realizes, are a universal journey and we travel it together.

★★★ JL

www.norton.co.uk



This Is An Uprising

by **Mark Engler and Paul Engler** (Nation Books, ISBN 9781568587332)

In this thorough and authoritative book, Mark and Paul Engler take the reader on a globe-spanning tour of the history and present state of nonviolent protest, its tactics, successes and failures and the prognosis for its future use. Beginning with Martin Luther King Jr in 1963 and the Birmingham and Selma desegregation campaigns, their account takes in Gandhi's

Englers set out the common factors shared by successful mobilizations and they offer a blueprint for mass movement rebellion. The chapter on the theoretical work of Saul Alinsky, the 'founding father of community organizing' and the section outlining the tactics of the Earth First! ecology movement are particularly illuminating.

Time and again the authors show how seemingly powerless and marginal people can, through civil resistance, organize, confront, disrupt and, given favourable circumstances, overthrow overweening power. As Mark and Paul Engler rightly say: 'the potential for what can happen when people refuse to obey must constantly be learned anew'. Both as a primer on the theory of non-violent protest and as a practical guide to positive action, their book is an invaluable resource in the ongoing learning process.

★★★ PW

nationbooks.org

Salt March, the Otpor movement in Serbia, the Occupy campaign and the Arab Spring among many others.

Drawing on articles – including work in this publication – and discussions with many activists and thinkers, the

Bad News

by **Anjan Sundaram** (Bloomsbury, ISBN 9781408866450)

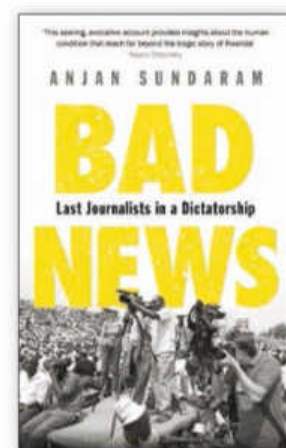
When Paul Kagame took power in Rwanda following the 1994 massacre, there was tentative hope that, under his leadership, the country's traumatized people could rebuild their shattered nation. Articulate and mild-mannered, Kagame was just the sort of 'moderate' African leader the West craved. Foreign aid poured in as Rwanda became the poster-child for what could be achieved by targeted aid and a compliant regime. Two decades on and, with an increasingly repressive Kagame bowing to 'popular demand' that he stand for a third presidential term, such hopes seem forlorn and naïve.

Freelance journalist Anjan Sundaram brings us the bad news from the sharp end of a deteriorating situation in Rwanda. Teaching in a Western-funded programme to train journalists, he was in an ideal position to observe firsthand the crackdown on the media and the increasing paranoia and violence of a ruling clique. Grenade attacks, arrests, disappearances and summary executions have been used against courageous journalists desperately trying to report

the truth. Sundaram tells the individual stories of this dwindling band of reporters with immediacy and anger. He offers little for our comfort in this impassioned account of the 'last journalists in a dictatorship', ending with a reprint of an abject apology issued to Kagame by a newspaper that had printed a critical piece. Here is his description: 'The front page was filled by an image of the president and a journalist. The headline read "Sorry". The president stood tall, his hand outstretched. The journalist, hands clasped together, bowed before him. It was the end of freedom.'

★★★ PW

bloomsbury.com



Betty Boo

by **Claudia Piñeiro**, translated by **Miranda France** (Bitter Lemon Press ISBN 978 1 908524 55 3)

An unlikeable industrialist is found with his throat slit from ear to ear in an exclusive gated community – or ‘country club’ – near Buenos Aires. The official line is that he killed himself, oddly, in exactly the same way his wife ‘accidentally’ died a few years earlier. So begins the latest darkly comic thriller from Argentina’s bestselling crime writer, Claudia Piñeiro.

Soon three characters, fiction writer Nurit Iscar (aka Betty Boo), veteran newspaper journalist Jaime Brena (demoted from the Crime desk for committing honesty live on TV), and the wet-behind-the-ears cub who is his replacement (known only as Crime Boy) form an unlikely trio in search of the truth.

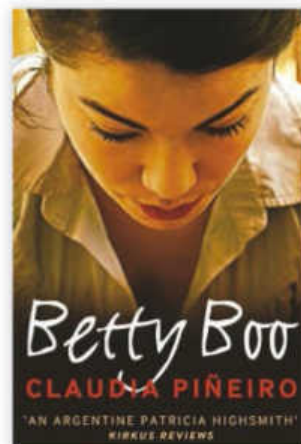
Not a simple – or safe thing to do – in

a contemporary Argentina dominated by dodgy media moguls, corrupt police, powerful industrialists and the dark shadows still thrown by a legacy of military dictatorship. The deaths mount – all connected and all apparently accidental. And the story builds, via much irony and comradeship, to a chilling climax.

Betty Boo is a sinister and gripping tale that moves along at a wild pace, but betrays a political and psychological seriousness that takes it beyond being just a skilful whodunit. As the eponymous hero herself says: ‘Abuse, revenge, pacts of silence: these are more complicated and turbid matters than who wielded the knife.’

★★★★ VB

bitterlemonpress.com



Also out there...



MUSIC *Girlz with Gunz* (Glitterbeat) is a 27-minute taster EP from Chimurenga Resistance’s **Tendai Maraire** and **Hussein Kalonji** (left), a hip-hop duo who are part of the African Black Constellation movement. They bring their Zimbabwean-Congolese heritage to some hard-edged hip-hop beats. An album follows later this year. *Aloha Got Soul* (Strut Records) is a fascinating tale of how soul, rock and disco was transmogrified on its arrival in Hawaii into something that the

territory made its own. Covering the period, it features a host of home-grown bands who really should be better known. Maybe this is the start of it.

FILM Michel Franko’s **Chronic** (right) coolly observes a nurse (a restrained Tim Roth) caring for a succession of terminally ill patients in their homes. He showers and dresses his patients, but also just sits, holding a hand, chatting, building a (short-term) relationship. There seems to be no overall narrative but it gradually becomes clear that his own son has died, after a terminal illness, and that he needs his patients as much as they need him. It’s a haunting, unsettling film with echoes of Michael Haneke’s *Amour*.

The titular **The Last Saint** is a Polynesian youth struggling emotionally, physically and financially with his mother’s drug



addiction and estranged father’s pressure to sharpen up and work for a living in the family’s Auckland business – distributing P or methamphetamine. The rounded, sympathetic portrayal is convincing, but let down by an overblown, clichéd script.

Warriors is an enjoyable doc about a Maasai cricket team and the wider horizons the game offers to both boys and girls. Their team strives to reach an international final at the hallowed Lords ground and (male) team members gain the status and confidence to challenge (male) elders to end the practice of female genital mutilation.

BOOK *Royal Babylon* (Skycraper) is a blast of investigative journalism in verse from Heathcote Williams, a master of the genre. In 500 stanzas he lays out ‘the criminal record of the British royal family’. Forensic in detail (and richly referenced) it roars with political fire in the belly, outrage at egregious inequality, lack of compassion and moral vacuity. One theme dominates: killing.

‘The country survives despite its own past not because of it/ Its infantile wish for a benign parent above politics/ persuades it to ignore unpleasant facts, such as the sovereign’s endorsing / the nastiest political act of all, namely killing.’ Lubricating wars by ‘gulling soldiers into dutifully dying’ or encouraging (and in the case of gunrunner Prince Andrew actually partaking in) arms-trade profiteering. And then there’s the royal passion for ‘blood sports’ – Prince Philip bragging of bagging 10,000 grouse in just seven days. Such animal-lovers. Nobody comes off well from Williams’ pen – not even the plutocratic (6,000 billion pounds-worth apparently) monarch herself. And don’t, for heaven’s sake, mention the Nazis...



REVIEWS EDITOR: **Vanessa Baird** email: vanessab@newint.org

Reviewers: Louise Gray, Jo Lateu, Malcolm Lewis, Peter Whittaker, Vanessa Baird

STAR RATING

★★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★★★ VERY GOOD ★★★ GOOD ★★ FAIR ★ POOR



Our shadowy corporate overlords

The good thing about the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is that simply mentioning their names takes up almost half my word count for this column. Sure, they're a catastrophic assault on democracy – but they also make my job phenomenally easy. Therefore, I for one welcome our new shadowy corporate overlords.

TTIP presents the activists among us with the twin problems of being so boringly bureaucratic that no-one cares, yet so ludicrous that as soon as you try to spread the word, you sound like a conspiracy theorist.

For example, take the Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS), which not only further handsomely boosts my word count, but also defies belief. An ISDS gives private investors the ability to sue governments for introducing legislation that harms their profits. But there's a reason laws related to air quality or employment rights exist: to protect us and make life nicer! An ISDS makes as much sense as letting ISIS sue France for making terrorism illegal.

The Guardian notes a similar example: 'An Australian firm is suing El Salvador's government for \$300 million for refusing permission for a goldmine over concerns it would poison the drinking water.' Which is completely fair, isn't it? I mean, be reasonable: how are murderers expected to generate shareholder value with all this red tape in the way? In the gold industry, sometimes people need to die. That's just a fact. And besides, would you rather be dull and alive, or wearing jewellery and dead? Exactly. Gimme that bling with a sweet side of poison!

In what world does it make sense to hand over democratically accountable power to non-accountable

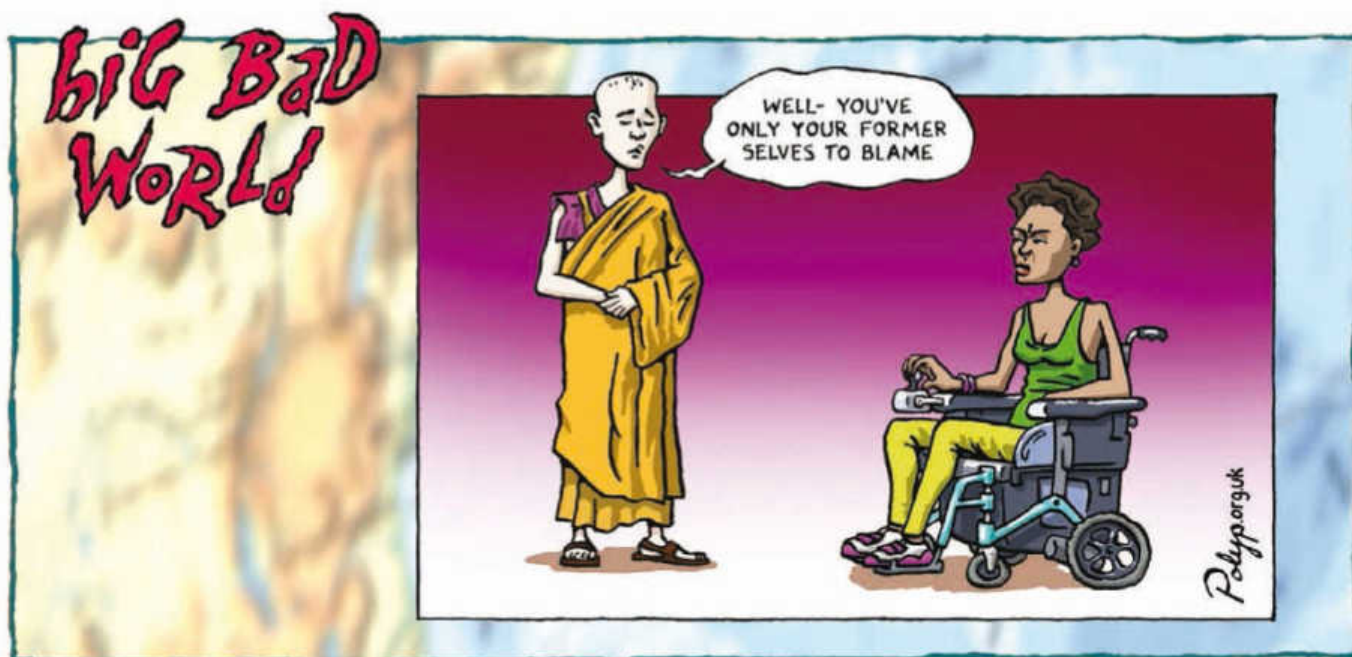
corporate interests? Companies argue that these laws will hurt their sales. But that's the whole bloody point. We're stopping you from doing terrible things! You shouldn't get compensation for that.

A better-known example of ISDS is cigarette giant Philip Morris claiming \$25 million compensation from Uruguay after it announced plans to increase the size of health warnings on cigarette packets. In any sane world, we'd be suing them! It's like a thief taking a pub to court for putting up signs telling people to beware of pickpockets. 'I'm suing you for lost earnings. How do you expect me to steal people's wallets with all these warnings around the place?'

ISDSs aren't exactly popular. In fact, 97 per cent of responses to a recent European Union survey on ISDSs were negative. You've got to admit, that's quite high. In fact, the opposition is so strong that I'm a trifle worried a corporation will sue us all for hindering their ability to take us to court.

Do you know what? I say: let corporations sue us. We'll just refuse to pay. What are they going to do, invade us? I'd like to see a cigarette company try. Okay, maybe a company like BAE Systems actually could. But the point is, there has to be a way to resist it. Each country should start its own investor courts. For every penny a company tries to claim for lost profit, we counter-sue for lost lives, for a poorer environment, for untold misery. Believe me: if El Salvador did that, they really would have a gold rush on their hands. ■

Chris Coltrane is a stand-up comedian and anti-austerity activist. Follow him on Twitter: [chris_coltrane](#). His show 'Activism Is Fun' is a free download at [chriscoltrane.com](#)





Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

Job: President of Turkey

Reputation: Ambitious autocrat in pious clothes

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan isn't afraid of making enemies. These days he is at war on almost every conceivable front. He first rose to national prominence in 2002 when his Justice and Development Party (AKP) won a majority in parliament and he became Prime Minister. The party has its roots in the Turkish tradition of political Islam (opposed to the strong Turkish secular traditions dating back to Atatürk). During a brief stint as mayor of Istanbul, Erdoğan earned a reputation as a mild reformer on issues such as traffic and pollution and there were brief hopes that he could be the face of a more tolerant and democratic political Islam. These soon crashed in flames as his tendency to regard politics as a form of death match became all too apparent.

Today, the range of Erdoğan's enemies is truly impressive: secular civil society, the Turkish Left, the Kurds, Shi'a Muslims, the young environmentalists of Gezi Park, Armenians and other minority groups in Turkey, and, following the shooting down of a Russian fighter plane by Turkish forces in November, Russian boss Vladimir Putin. One might be forgiven for thinking that Putin and Erdoğan might have found some common ground as two of the more humourless and intolerant specimens the global political class has on offer. But no.

The pious Erdoğan is proving a keen micro-manager of Turkish behaviour, with schemes to criminalize adultery and create 'alcohol-free' zones. An old-school kind of guy, Erdoğan is not fond of social media either, threatening to outlaw Twitter and arresting teenagers who don't show him enough respect in their Facebook posts. He does, however, believe in the proper trappings of pomp in government, overseeing a new 1,100-room presidential complex costing a cool \$615 million.

Syria is the thorn in the side of Erdoğan's geopolitical ambitions. With Syrian President 'Basher' Assad, a Shi'a ally of Iran, in well-deserved



The end of satire, Erdoğan-style (see: 'Sense of humour' below).

trouble, Erdoğan joined hands with Saudi Arabia's House of Saud to see if together they could move the failed democratic experiment of the Damascus Spring in the direction of Sunni fundamentalism. They succeeded, probably beyond their expectations, with the emergence of the barbaric ISIS or Daesh. But despite ISIS's infamy, the Erdoğan regime has continued to support it covertly, allowing the purchase of its black-market oil and permitting the flow of arms and recruits across the Syrian frontier. Daesh sympathizers in Turkey have shown their gratitude by murdering hundreds of Erdoğan's leftist opponents through terrorist bombings of their political rallies.

Erdoğan surprised many observers when he ran to become president (at that time a largely symbolic position) in 2014. Though he succeeded, the AKP lost its majority and the pro-democratic HDP party entered parliament for the first time. This frustrated his plans for a beefed-up presidency. Using the excuse of Daesh's terrorist outrages, Erdoğan then launched a 'war of tension', declaring martial law and blowing up the fragile peace accord worked out with Kurdish nationalists. Playing the anti-Kurdish card plays the same role as the anti-Armenian campaigns did for an earlier generation of chauvinistic Turkish politicians. In this

atmosphere of crisis, the democratic space contracted dramatically, with the arrest and even assassination of 'treasonous' journalists and activists, and a full-scale military assault on the Kurdish regions of the country. Fortunately for Erdoğan (though perhaps not for Turkey), his artificially created state of crisis allowed the AKP to regain its majority position in the 2015 elections. ■

LOW CUNNING:

Erdoğan is adroit at playing the old game of 'bait and switch'. He apologizes to the young Gezi Park protesters and then has them all rounded up by police. He is a militant of the 'war on terror' while covertly supporting ISIS. He makes war on the Kurdish Workers' Party, then makes an historic peace, then declares them terrorists and starts the war up again.

SENSE OF HUMOUR:

Erdoğan caused Turkish humourists to throw up their hands and declare the 'end of satire' last year, when he greeted visiting dignitaries surrounded by a phalanx of 16 actors dressed in historical costume meant to evoke previous Turkish rulers.



Sources: *The Guardian*; BBC; Wikipedia; Al Jazeera; *Times of India*; opendemocracy.net; anonhq.com; rt.com; Middle East Report.

Adem Altan/AP/Press Association Images



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Revolution beyond the ballot box

It was a remarkable development:

a January poll in Iowa, the Midwestern state where the US presidential race officially begins, showed that 43 per cent of Democratic Party primary voters identified as socialists.

Iowa is my home state, and I assure you that it is not known as a hotbed of radicalism. Corporate agribusiness is powerful there, and insurance companies make up a dominant industry in the state capital.

The surge of interest in socialism – and a willingness to break with deep-seated American political taboos to openly espouse it – clearly owes much to one man: Bernie Sanders.

As I write, early electoral contests in Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South Carolina have yet to take place. Whatever their outcome, Sanders has already accomplished far more than virtually any professional pundit had expected. Calling for a ‘political revolution’, Sanders has reinvigorated the debate over single-payer healthcare. He has rallied 170 economists in support of his plan to break up Wall Street’s biggest banks. And he has made his rivals scramble to articulate how they would be more vigorous opponents of corporate greed.

Republicans claimed for years, to the chagrin of actual leftists, that figures such as Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton were unrepentant socialists. Ultimately, the move may have backfired: in this campaign cycle, the charge has lost its potency as a political slur. When called out, Sanders turns on his accusers and asks why they, too, have not joined the fight against rampant inequality and rule by the rich.

The strength of a presidential run is that it allows a campaign to communicate with a far wider swath of the American public than typically pays attention to politics. It is a moment of peak engagement.

Yet there are downsides as well.

The winner-take-all nature of the electoral system lends itself to messianic thinking. Fervour for a candidate may burn bright, but campaigns that fall short often leave little behind – and even those that prevail do not necessarily produce lasting movements.

In this respect, the Obama campaign offers a cautionary tale. Famed organizer Marshall Ganz helped to set up team Obama’s grassroots infrastructure in 2007 and 2008. But as the new administration

took office, he was deflated by what transpired next.

Ganz charged that ‘the president demobilized the widest, deepest and most effective grassroots organization ever built to support a Democratic president. With the help of new media and a core of some 3,000 well-trained and highly motivated organizers, 13.5 million volunteers set the Obama campaign apart... But the Obama team put the whole thing to sleep.’

In one of his most forceful statements, Sanders has offered a different vision for citizen engagement. He argued that ‘no matter who is elected to be president, that person will not be able to address the enormous problems facing the working families of our country. They will not be able to succeed because the power of corporate America, the power of Wall Street... is so great that no president alone can stand up to them. That is the truth.’

Sanders has instead emphasized the need to involve ‘millions of people in the process who are not now involved’, and to ‘organize and educate and create grassroots movements’.

Ironically, embracing Sanders’ words means looking beyond his campaign and also pushing from outside the limits of electoral action.

In mid-April, thousands of activists will descend on Washington DC as part of an effort known as Democracy Spring, voicing a demand to end big-money control of US politics. Already, more than 1,500 have vowed to risk arrest in what the campaign is calling ‘one of the largest civil-disobedience actions in a generation’.

Whether or not Sanders continues to defy the odds with his insurgent primary run, such acts of determination and sacrifice will remain critical. Indeed, a democratic revolution will require them. ■

Mark Engler’s new book *This Is An Uprising: How Nonviolent Revolt Is Shaping the 21st Century* has just been published by Nation Books. He can be reached via the website DemocracyUprising.com

Puzzle Page by Axe

The crossword prize is a voucher for our online shop to the equivalent of \$30. Only the winner will be notified. Send your entries by 23 March to: New Internationalist Puzzle Page, The Old Music Hall, 106-108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JE, UK; fax to +44 1865 403346; or email a scan to: puzzlepage@newint.org
Winner for Crossword 207: Alf Jenkins, Bundoora, Victoria, Australia.

Crossword 209

CRYPTIC Across

- 1 Part of Scotland and Arkansas drawn with extremely grey lines (6)
- 4 Costa del Sol resort, girl's ultimate ruin (8)
- 9 Good chicken here in France British quarter four times (6)
- 10 Bad ASEAN order for Indonesian waters (5,3)
- 11 Cuppa in the East End this girl needed? (5,3)
- 13 Dan mistreated woman in a state (6)
- 15 Greek actor not quiet about doing 'Hair' here? (12)
- 18 French department initiate golf here, going west between ocean and river (5-2-5)
- 21 Partially banned a goatherd returning to part of Ethiopia (6)
- 22 Poor European politician is first returned for a place in Wales (8)
- 24 Hag is beaten up by French women in Libyan town (8)
- 25 Nazi no way's accepted initially at the front (6)
- 26 Corrupt ranee sat in Asia Minor (4,4)
- 27 Many ANZACs take a part of Kenya (6)

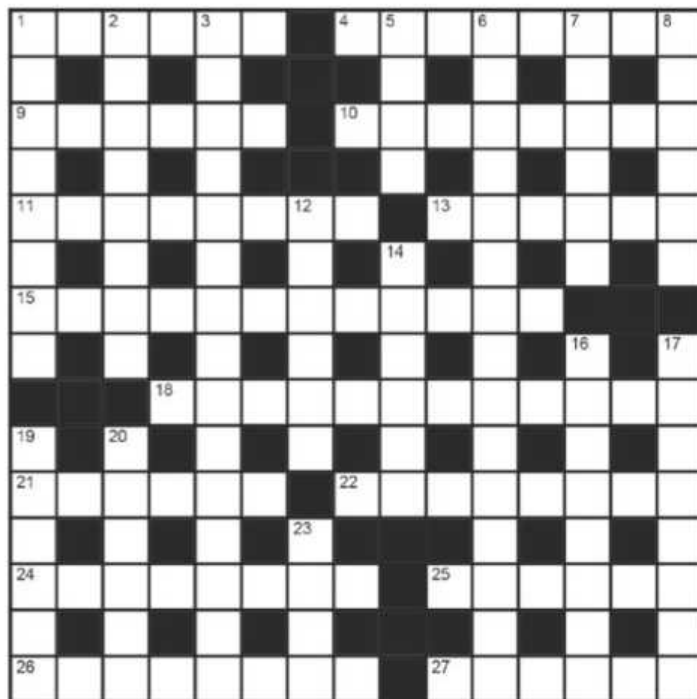
CRYPTIC Down

- 1 Key right to drill brought up at botanical gardens (8)
- 2 Girl follows boy to a point in a Scottish valley (4,4)
- 3 Inferior people and the old wash with water, Canadian water (6,5,4)
- 5 American organized support for the island of Ireland (4)
- 6 Blair debonairly trashed the Oxford book scene (8,7)
- 7 Salt from India's in the caboose, but no tea to report (6)
- 8 Myanmar state, and what area's also known as in the Royal Navy (6)
- 12 Good man shunned robbing an old London studio (6)
- 14 One gets attached to girl old flame embraced (6)
- 16 One from the Western Med's a Catholic engaging in ancient Greek (8)
- 17 Rum's a precious little sea throwback (8)
- 19 A name presented to Chinese society of a Pacific islander (6)
- 20 Equal to a North American, Brazil state (6)

- 23 Monstrosity of Scotland separateness issues? (4)

QUICK Across

- 1 ----- and Bute, Scottish administrative district (6)
- 4 Costa del Sol's flagship resort (8)
- 9 Bourg en -----, area of S Burgundy known for its chicken rearing (6)
- 10 Water that separates the Central and South Moluccas in Indonesia (5,3)
- 11 Cockney rhyming slang for 'tea' (5,3)
- 13 The Sagebrush State, the 36th of the Union (6)
- 15 Recipient of two letters from Paul the Apostle (12)
- 18 French department, capital Angers (5-2-5)
- 21 Desert area of Ethiopia disputed by Somalia (6)
- 22 Welsh castle town, the origins of the Tudor dynasty (8)
- 24 Libyan oasis (8)
- 25 Dashboard (6)
- 26 The Levant, Asia Minor and the Balkans, collectively (4,4)
- 27 Part of Kenya, capital Kisumu (6)



QUICK Down

- 1 Tree plantations (8)
- 2 Scots skiing valley in the Grampians, near Braemar (4,4)
- 3 Body of water in central Alberta (6,5,4)
- 5 Irish island group in Galway Bay (4)
- 6 Oxford University building founded in 1602 (8,7)
- 7 (East Indian) sailor or camp follower (6)
- 8 West coast state of Myanmar, capital Sittwe (6)

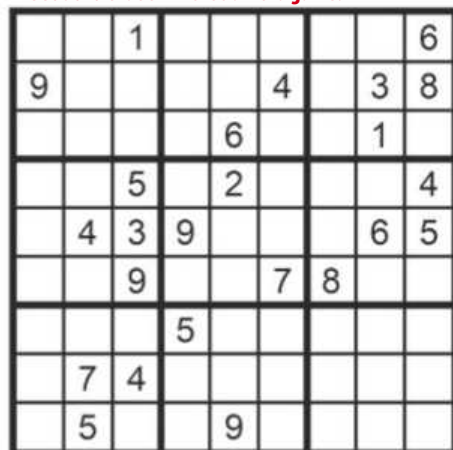
- 12 West London borough incorporating the W5 postal district (6)
- 14 Wing (6)
- 16 Referring to a particular Balearic island (8)
- 17 Area of Guyana famous for its cane sugar (8)
- 19 Resident of Nuku'alofa (6)
- 20 South America's second largest river system (6)
- 23 Scottish loch linked to the sea by the Caledonian Canal (4)

LAST MONTH'S SOLUTION

Across: 1 Blenheim, 6 Moghul, 9 Moor, 10 Ionic, 11 Lapp, 12 Copenhagen, 13 Imam, 14 Place name, 16 Iowan, 18 Halle, 20 Orcadians, 22 Asad, 23 Bessarabia, 25 Erin, 26 Rhine, 27 Iron, 28 Albany, 29 Evacuees.
Down: 2 Loo roll, 3 Norse, 4 Epiphany, 5 Montgomeryshire, 6 Macon, 7 Gallipoli, 8 Uppsala, 15 Caledonia, 17 Pasadena, 19 Austral, 21 Noisome, 23 Barry, 24 Adieu.

Sudoku 55

The Sudoku that thinks it's a word game!



Now, using the key below, substitute letters for the numbers in the south-eastern block...

1=L; 2=S; 3=U; 4=B; 5=E; 6=A; 7=N; 8=D; 9=T

...and make as many words as you can of five letters or more from the nine letters in the keyword, the extra clue to which is: 'English town on the southern list's initially drab'. You cannot use the same letter more than once, nor use proper nouns (excepting the keyword), slang, offensive words, abbreviations, participles or simple plurals (adding an 's' or 'es').

GOOD 70 words of at least five letters, including 25 of six letters or more

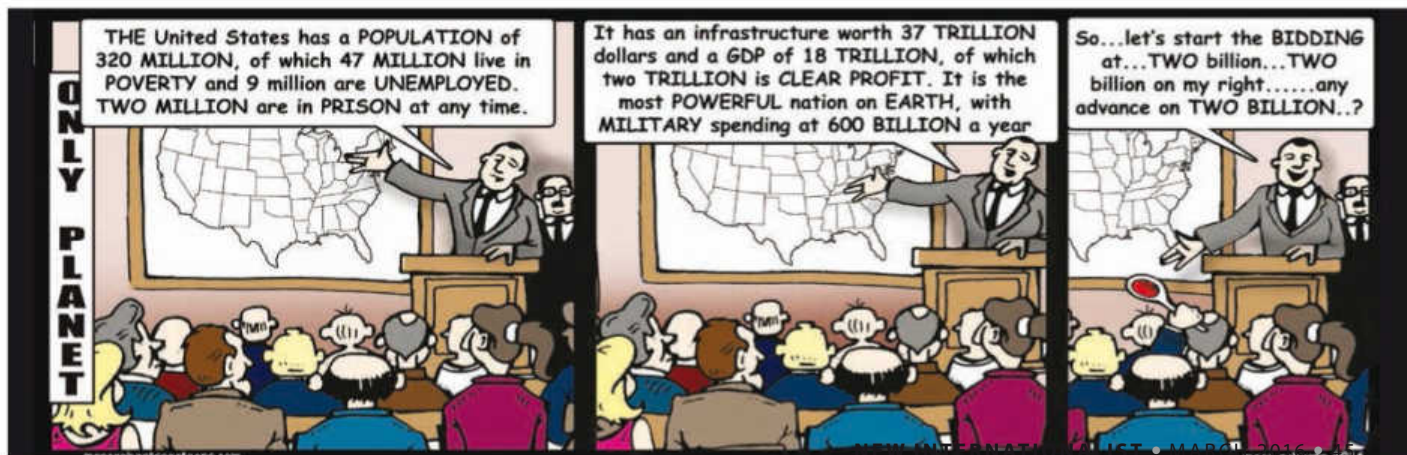
VERY GOOD 80 words of at least five letters, including 30 of six letters or more.

EXCELLENT 90 words of at least five letters, including 35 words of six letters or more.

Last month's **Sudoku keyword**: 'Axminster'.

Solution to Wordsearch 54 The 19 French cities were: Bordeaux, Boulogne, Caen, Cannes, Dijon, Lille, Limoges, Lyon, Marseille, Nancy, Nantes, Nice, Paris, Poitiers, Rouen, Strasbourg, Toulon, Toulouse, Tours.

Wordsearch 55 Find the 19 largest countries in the world (by area) hidden here.



Anjan Sundaram



The Indian-born reporter and author talks to GRAEME GREEN about the challenges of running a journalist training programme in Rwanda and the importance of free speech.

What inspires you?

I'm inspired by people who live deeply and express that through their work, whether literature, music or film. When I feel an authenticity of emotional content in someone's work, it moves me a great deal.

What issues are you politically passionate about?

Inequality. The free press. The ability of people to express themselves. I see self-expression as fundamental to who we are as human beings.

You've written about DR Congo before, and now Rwanda. What attracts you to these places?

I'm attracted to places where there's great change and turmoil happening and where people cannot speak up, where people's situations are relatively unreported. Congo had a war with very little reporting. In Rwanda, it's outwardly stable; on the surface, you only see the narrative about the government's success since the 1994 genocide, with ethnic reconciliation and economic growth, but the journalists I trained introduced me to a world where people were unable to speak up. There's a strong undercurrent of repression.

Is Rwanda living under a dictatorship?

Absolutely. President Paul Kagame is extremely good at creating a façade. The repression of the free press and the silencing of any voices of dissent could very quickly turn into something far more violent and dangerous. The underlying forces that led to the genocide haven't changed.

Could the situation blow up again?

I'd hesitate to say another genocide, but it's clear that a true transfer of power from Kagame to anyone else is likely to be violent, given that he has destroyed every institution in the country that

could smooth that transition. There's no independent judiciary, no independent parliament, no independent press. Power resides in the hands of one man.

How difficult was it to run a journalist training programme in the country?

Over time it became very hard to operate or to receive any funding. Donors told us that the government saw any financing of the press as a threat to its rule. They made a choice to appease the government and have a seat at the table on the government's terms, so they removed funding. It led to the demise of the programme. There are very few forums open now for journalism in Rwanda and very few journalists exercising their profession with any degree of freedom.

What are the dangers of there being no free press?

It's extremely dangerous. Genocide is one example. During the genocide, there were people who stood up to the government and said: 'This genocide is wrong. We should not be killing the Tutsis. The government's policies are flawed.' Those people were killed, imprisoned or exiled. Gradually, society was silenced until there was only one voice that people could hear: the government's.

Is journalism worth risking your life for?

I've often wondered. But there's something about the abuse of power that gets to me. When I see power being abused, there's something that makes me want to expose it, to investigate it, to understand it. To turn my back on that: I would regret it. It's a very personal decision. Each of us has to draw the line where we think it should be drawn.

Where do you feel most at home?

Probably in India – when I arrive there, I feel a sense of home. I haven't lived in India much, so it's an abstract, dissociative sense of home. But I travel a lot and I like to make my home wherever I am. That's something that fuels my work. When I move to a place, I try to live as deeply and richly as I can in that place. I try to integrate into that society, to write and report from there. ■

Bad News: Last Journalists in a Dictatorship by Anjan Sundaram is published by Bloomsbury. Read our review on page 40.

Graeme Green is a journalist, photographer, travel writer and editor. graemegreen.org

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With warm wishes

Amanda Synnott
for the New Internationalist Co-operative



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Media control is becoming more concentrated in fewer hands. People consume more and more news online and many expect it for free. We have seen declining numbers of our print subscribers not yet replaced at the same rate by digital subscribers. Unfortunately, our subscription income no longer covers all costs involved in running our magazine.

We need to raise £30,000 (US \$43,000 / CAD \$60,000) by the end of April to help fund our independent in-depth journalism and provide an alternative to mainstream media. Can you help us? A donation, however small, is incredibly valuable to us. To donate, please go to newint.org/go/donate or send a cheque to New Internationalist, The Old Music Hall, 106-108 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1JE, UK.

Let's show that independent journalism is here to stay!

Thank you for reading this letter and for any support you can give us.

Helen Wallis

On behalf of New Internationalist Co-operative.

PS: A huge thank you to everyone who has donated so far!



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